

Socialist Worker

For a socialist alternative to Labour

50p

inside

**T-shirts
drenched
in sweat**

pages 8 & 9

**Post Office:
Desperate bosses are
raising the stakes**

page 5

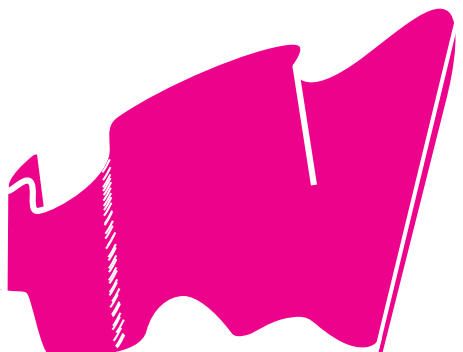
**WHY IS
THERE A
FOOT
AND
MOUTH
SCARE?**

page 3

Solidarity price £1

Socialists launch election campaign

Now you can hit back at Tory Blair



Socialist
Alliance



Scottish
Socialist
Party

THE SOCIALIST Alliance launched its general election campaign this week.

People across Britain now have the chance to say a resounding no to Tony Blair's pro-market, pro-privatisation policies, and to vote for a socialist alternative.

Over 60 Socialist Alliance candidates in England and Wales will join the 72 Scottish Socialist Party candidates standing in every constituency in Scotland.

The candidates are not careerists or bankrolled by millionaires.

They are working class people, like those pictured right, who will take only the average working wage of those who elect them.

Challenge

They include car workers, postal workers, rail and tube workers, health workers, teachers, pensioners, environmental campaigners and community activists.

Fellow trade unionists, campaigners and high profile figures have responded enthusiastically to news of the socialist election challenge.

Dave Toomer, president of the National Union of Journalists, is one of the many Socialist Alliance supporters in Manchester.

Peter Grant, a branch secretary for the rail union ASLEF, says, "New Labour have let us down on their promise of an integrated transport policy."

"The Socialist Alliance stands for renationalising the railways and stopping the privatisation of air traffic control."

●continued on page 2



CECILIA PROSPER,
housing worker



NICK RILEY,
steel worker



ANGELA THOMPSON,
Dudley striker

SPARKS
FLY

Mean Peugeot

MULTINATIONAL car firm Peugeot is telling workers at its plant near Coventry to work harder, and is refusing to give them a decent pay rise.

Yet Peugeot has just announced a leap in profits, up 80 percent to a huge £818 million.

Last week Peugeot workers showed what they thought of that by throwing out the company's pay offer by an 82 percent majority.

College blocked

AROUND 150 students at Sussex University marched to the vice-chancellor's office on Monday of this week.

They blockaded it and shut him out to defend 160 students who are threatened with expulsion over the non-payment of tuition fees.

On Tuesday they went further and occupied the finance office. They were still there when *Socialist Worker* went to press.

●**Stephen Church**

Wimpey cuts

HOUSE BUILDING firm Wimpey plans to axe 400 jobs despite making record profits.

It announced a 30 percent leap in profits last week to a record £146 million. Shareholders will get a 14 percent rise in their dividend payouts.

Wimpey also wants to sack 400 white collar workers at nine regional offices to boost profits by around another £20 million.

Unit march

SOME 400 people marched through Greenock near Glasgow last Saturday in a protest against a threat to close the maternity unit at a local hospital.

Campaigners vowed they will keep up their fight to defend this vital service, and warned that the closure would cost lives.

●**Full story on page 14**

Rolls out

OVER 500 workers at the Rolls-Royce Aerospace factory in Ansty near Coventry struck on Monday.

It was their second one-day strike against threatened job losses.

●**Full story on page 15**

Site deaths

AROUND 100 families and construction workers lobbied a conference on Tuesday over safety on construction sites. Michael Meacher MP was harangued for ignoring the victims' families demands for justice.

●**Full story on page 14**

Candidates offer a different vision

●**continued from page 1**

George Watson used to be a Labour Party councillor, and is a former branch official in the miners' NUM union at

Silverhill colliery.

He has put himself forward to fight against defence secretary Geoff Hoon in Ashfield.

"The Socialist Alliance can go from strength to

strength. It can breed optimism in communities where the Tories and New Labour have bred despair," says George.

"New Labour have been in alliance with business, and they've dumped the rest of the people.

"It is vitally important we have this alternative for those who feel disillusioned with Labour, and which campaigns on the issues which affect working class people."



Wide support

HIGH PROFILE figures like playwright **Harold Pinter** are backing the Socialist Alliance.

He says, "There has to be positive and practical resistance to 'big business' government, and the Socialist Alliance has to be it.

"This country is doomed if we can't organise and support an energetic and determined alternative force, for which social justice is an aspiration which will not be surrendered."

Film director **Ken Loach** is also offering his support.

"Labour is now proud to be the party of big business. Thank goodness there is now an alternative in the general election—the Socialist Alliance," he says.

"The Socialist Alliance is doing what the Labour Party was formed to do—understand and represent the interests of ordinary people."

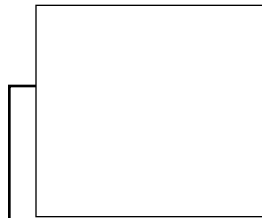
Comedians **Linda Smith, Jeremy Hardy, Rob Newman and Mark Steel** are also backing the Socialist Alliance.

And actor **Ricky Tomlinson**, who plays Jim Royle in the hit TV show *The Royle Family*, says, "New Labour is old Conservatism. I am supporting the Socialist Alliance."

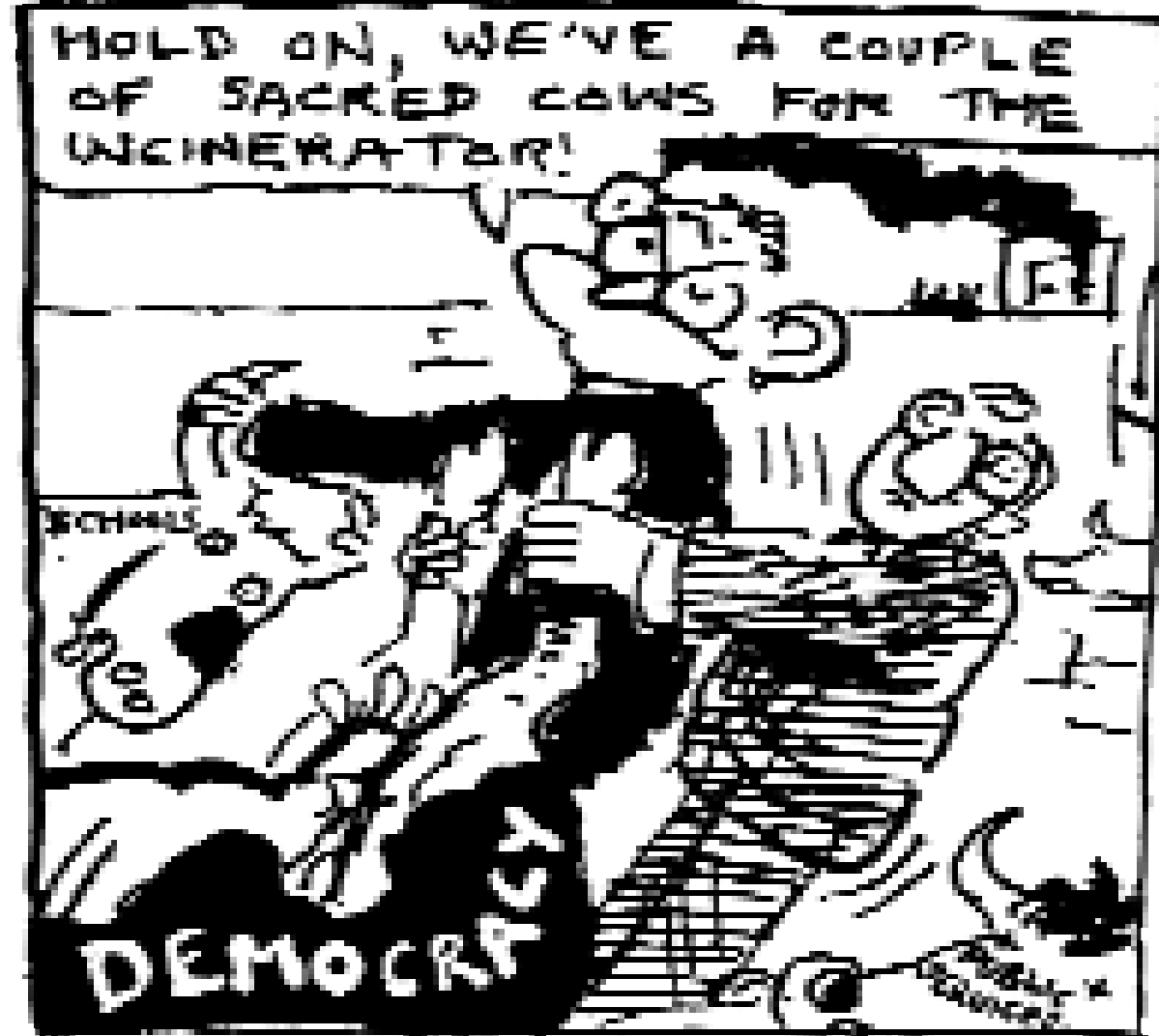
Award-winning journalists **John Pilger** and **Paul Foot** are calling for people to get actively involved to build support for socialist candidates wherever they can.

Ken Coates, a former Labour MEP in North Derbyshire who was expelled by the party for keeping to his principles, has given an enthusiastic endorsement to the Socialist Alliance.

He says, "I represented the Labour Party for a very long time, and I can tell you there is an enormous amount of disquiet about the way the government is ignoring the needs and wishes of the people who have always supported Labour."



MARK THOMAS, investigative journalist, says, "The Socialist Alliance can be proud of the fact that it has got people to unite who haven't traditionally worked together. "It has done this by emphasising what we have in common, the principles of an equal distribution of wealth, and of a society that will no longer be run by the rich for the rich but by the majority in the interests of the majority."



Reasons to vote socialist X

Scots

backing

SOCIALIST MEMBER of the Scottish Parliament **Tommy Sheridan** welcomed the launch of the Socialist Alliance by saying, "Just like the citizens of Scotland, the citizens of England and Wales now have an alternative.

"I urge people where they can to support the socialist candidate and not one of the free market Tories."

Take back rail

PRIVATISED train company Go-Ahead is making booming profits and stuffing money into shareholders' pockets despite admitting that "our passengers have had to endure unbearable overcrowding and delay".

The firm owns Thames Trains (involved in the 1999 Southall rail disaster), London's Thameslink

services, and will take over the south London network from Connex.

Go-Ahead saw profits jump over 11 percent to £24.8 million and increased payments to shareholders by 13 percent.

The Socialist Alliance backs the renationalisation of the rail network to ensure safety comes before profits.

TOP BANKERS are raking in the money.

Henry Paulson, chief executive of the Goldman Sachs investment bankers' group, pocketed £15.5 million in salary and bonuses last year.

David Komanskay, head of competitor bank Merrill Lynch, grabbed some £22.4 million.

Britain's biggest banking

group, HSBC, has given chairman Sir John Bond a whopping 113 percent pay rise to £1.6 million.

New Labour loves up to fat cats. Gavyn Davies, one of Goldman Sachs's top bankers, is mates with chancellor Gordon Brown.

The Socialist Alliance says tax the rich to fund public services.

TAX THE RICH

Stop

arms

trade

UNIVERSITIES have been exposed as major investors in the arms trade.

The Campaign Against the Arms Trade last year exposed 49 leading educational establishments which hold over 50 million shares in companies involved in arms manufacture, principally BAE Systems, Rolls-Royce and GKN.

Bristol University's pension fund holds more than a quarter of a million shares in the three arms merchants.

Campaigners in groups like Globalise Resistance are demanding colleges stop these deadly investments. The Socialist Alliance fully supports all these campaigns. ■**Details on www.caat.org.uk**

Photo finish

INSTANT camera firm Polaroid plans to sack 235 workers at its Dumbartonshire factory in Scotland despite soaring profits.

Polaroid's profits jumped from £5.2 million to £22 million last year.

One worker facing the axe said, "They are

throwing people on the scrapheap so the bosses can rake in cash."

One of those who could be handing out redundancy notices is "human resources" director Alistair Liddell, who is married to New Labour Scottish secretary Helen Liddell.

Equal pay Help the poor

WOMEN ARE still paid far less than men 25 years after the Equal Pay Act.

Women workers are paid an average 20 percent less than men, according to the Equal Pay Taskforce's survey published this week. For part time workers the gap is even bigger, at 45 percent.

"The situation in Britain is by far the worst in Europe," says survey author Dr Damien Grimshaw.

It exposes New Labour's supposed commitment to women. The Socialist Alliance is fighting for full equality for women workers—on pay and much more.

Help the poor

PRIVATE FIRM Capita is making millions from the misery of housing benefits claimants.

Capita has taken over a range of former public services including some local councils' housing benefits departments.

It saw profits jump 28 percent to a record £51.2 million last year. Capita runs housing benefits in Lambeth, south London.

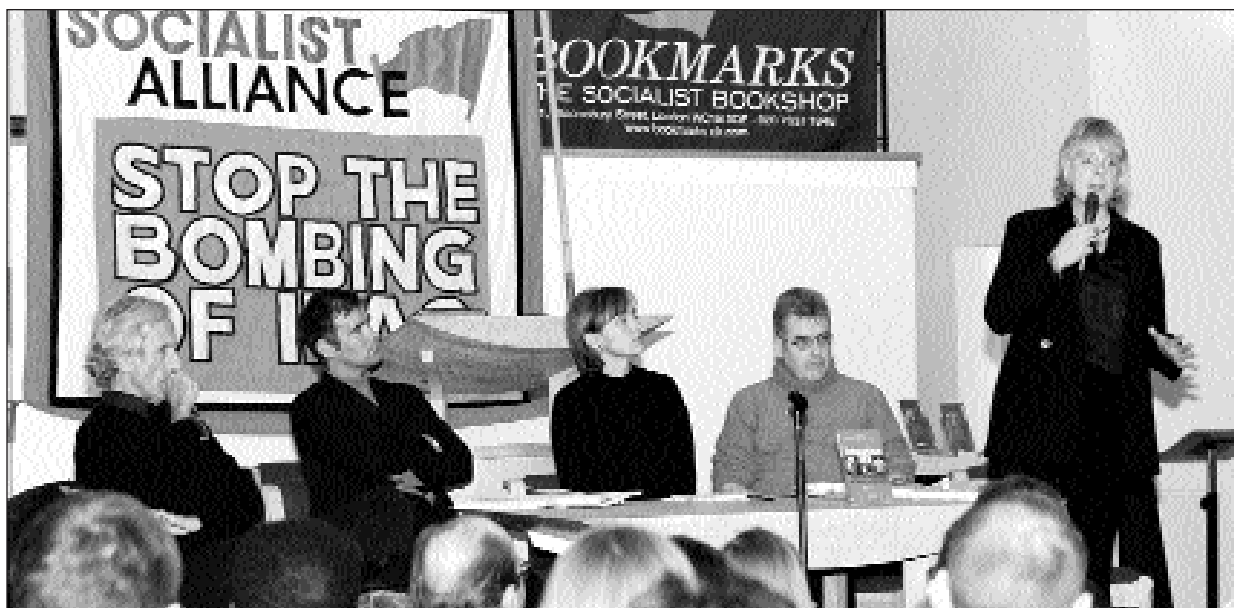
Local Socialist Alliance candidate for Vauxhall, Theresa Bennett, says, "Some of the poorest residents in Lambeth are threatened with eviction because of non-payment of housing benefits by Capita.

"The New Labour council should take the service back under public control."

what we think

Foot and mouth: why the crisis?

Socialist election campaign



OVER 200 people came to the launch of Tommy Sheridan and Alan McCombes's book *Imagine* in central London. Speakers included John Pilger and Socialist Alliance candidate Louise Christian

THROW EVERYTHING INTO OUR CHALLENGE

TWO SOCIALIST Workers Party national delegate meetings last weekend discussed the huge challenge posed by the election.

Both were brimming with enthusiasm at the prospect of the biggest and broadest ever left wing challenge to Labour. There were reports

from all around Britain of how the Socialist Alliance and the Scottish Socialist Party can be lightning conductors for the deep disgust people feel at Tony Blair.

It is not only felt amongst older, more established Labour supporters and former activists.

The young people and students who attended the recent Globalise Resistance counter-conference tour are just as interested in a left wing challenge to Blair.

We live in a world where \$60 million in debt repayment is transferred every day from the poorest nations to the banks, where 30,000 children die every day from easily preventable diseases.

Many can already see the connection between that world of inequality and injustice, and New Labour's free market, pro-business policies.

The Socialist Alliance can make that connection for many more.

The question, "Who can I vote for?" is being asked by former Labour voters at public meetings, campaign groups and union branches everywhere.

It is time to get moving.

The message of last weekend's meetings—and of this week's *Socialist Worker*—is that we must all now throw ourselves into campaigning.

The vote matters.

A good vote can boost all who want the left to be stronger.

We must follow the example of Withington in south Manchester, where



Alliance members have already got their first leaflet out to the entire constituency, or the example of Blackley constituency in north Manchester, where they have organised an anti-privatisation roadshow.

We need organisation in wards and constituencies up and running now.

If there is not a Socialist Alliance candidate in your constituency or area, still get involved.

Why not twin with the constituency you and your workmates can most easily campaign in?

There is no time to lose—whether the election is in April or in May.

We want to let Blair know that thousands of us reject his agenda and want genuine socialist policies.

You can make a difference in doing that.

FOOT AND mouth disease has dominated the press and TV for the last week.

The disease is highly infectious, and action is needed.

But it is not like BSE, mad cow disease, which passed to humans with devastating consequences.

There is little risk to humans from foot and mouth disease. No one is likely to die or even get ill.

Nor is foot and mouth disease generally fatal to animals. Most infected animals fully recover within a few weeks.

The reality was well summed up by the US business paper the *International Herald Tribune*: "Foot and mouth disease causes a loss of appetite so that farm animals gain less weight and give less milk—and the farmer gets less profit."

The drive for profits is barely mentioned in the media coverage—but should be central to all serious discussion.

The way capitalism in industrialised countries has developed agriculture is a major contributory factor to the spread of the disease.

There has been a drive to concentrate animals in ever greater numbers, often in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions.

Outbreak

This makes animals more disease-prone, and disease more likely to spread.

Putting profit above safety and need has also led to the closure of local abattoirs and the concentration of slaughter in a few giant sites—again making it more likely disease will spread.

One result has been the shipping of live animals hundreds of miles to giant slaughterhouses in the pursuit of a few percent extra on the profit margin.

This is why the current outbreak of foot and mouth has rapidly spread across Britain, whereas the previous major outbreak in 1967 remained confined to certain areas.

Animals from Northumberland are shipped to Essex, Europe and beyond

for slaughter for no rational reason, but purely for extra profit.

Yet it makes far more sense from every rational point of view to slaughter animals for food near where they are produced.

Some commentators argue that cheap food is the problem.

Most people in Britain do not find food cheap—ask any family struggling to pay the weekly bills.

Many farmers and the workers who buy food in the shops have been hit by the same people—the giant firms who control food distribution and sales.

One study estimates that 50 years ago farmers got something like 60p in every pound consumers paid. Now the figure is around 9p, says the study.

The beneficiaries are the giant supermarkets which dominate food supply.

Unhealthy

They have seen profits soar. The biggest, Tesco, almost hit £1 billion profit last year.

The same picture is true globally. Bodies like the IMF and World Trade Organisation tell countries they must grow crops for export to pay off debts.

The result is a glut of particular products on the world market, and prices plummet. That ruins the livelihoods of many small farmers in the Third World.

Consumers in industrialised countries don't benefit. Instead global food corporations get raw materials cheaply, process them into often unhealthy products and sell them at huge profit margins to us.

The answer is not more expensive food, nor to dream of a world of small communities supplied entirely from whatever food you can grow locally.

It is to harness the best of modern science and technology, including good animal husbandry and agricultural practice, so we can have healthy and cheap food. What stands in the way is profit.

Donate now

CECILIA PROSPER, the Socialist Alliance prospective parliamentary candidate for Hackney South and Shoreditch, launched her campaign last weekend.

She could only do so because of donations by trade unionists, community activists and students.

Cecilia and her supporters are delivering election leaflets to every house in the Hackney South constituency.

The Socialist Alliance and the Scottish Socialist Party both urgently need money for this to happen in every constituency where they are taking on New Labour.

Please rush in your donations to the National Network of Socialist Alliances, PO Box 121, Coventry CV1 5DA, phone 020 7536 9696, or to the SSP Election Fund, 73 Robertson Street, Glasgow G2 8QD, phone 0141 221 7714.

You can also donate to your local campaign. See page 12 or ring the above numbers for more information.

PIGS KILLED because of the foot and mouth crisis

SPARKS
FLY

Packed meeting

OVER 500 people packed a meeting last Saturday to look at what has changed two years after the Macpherson report into the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence.

Labour MP Diane Abbott spoke, condemning Jack Straw's decision not to sack Paul Condon, head of the Metropolitan Police, after the Macpherson report.

The number of people at this year's meeting rose sharply from last year. But many felt frustrated that their high hopes for change in the wake of the Macpherson report have not been realised.

Rights march

HANAN ASHWARI, the prominent Palestinian politician, has now backed the national demonstration for Palestinian rights on Saturday 17 March in London.

"Unfortunately I cannot attend the Palestinian rights demonstration, but I strongly support this initiative, and I hope that as many concerned citizens, students and trade unionists as possible in the UK take part," she said.

Rally speakers include George Galloway MP, Tony Benn MP, Bruce Kent and Afif Saffieh. It assembles in Hyde Park at 11am.

Strike on air?

AIR TRAFFIC controllers in the IPMS union could be on strike over the Easter period in protest at the government's plans to privatise the National Air Traffic Service.

Scotland on Sunday revealed last weekend that there was an 80 per cent vote for strike action in an indicative ballot.

This means that there will now be another ballot which, if successful, will trigger a strike.

Protest at Gap

CAMPAIGNERS plan protests outside Gap stores across Britain next week. The protests, called by the Globalise Resistance organisation, are to mark International Women's Day.

They will highlight the appalling pay and conditions the workers, many of them young women, who make Gap clothes suffer in Third World countries.

● **Full story on centre pages**

Luton meeting

HUNDREDS OF students packed into an angry meeting at Luton University last week.

They were furious at college management's plans to axe courses and exclude students who had not paid the tuition fees imposed by the New Labour government.

● **Full story on page 15**

Globalise Resistance

Get on board for protest at Genoa summit

OVER 220 people attended a meeting in Conway Hall in London on Tuesday of last week to kick-start Globalise Resistance's mobilisation for the G8 summit in Genoa, Italy.

Everybody who was there is planning to travel to Genoa on 20-22 July to protest at the summit, where leaders from the world's eight richest countries will gather.

Protesters are demanding the cancellation of Third World debt, and for the people of the world to be put before the profits of the multinationals.

The US and Britain had just carried out their barbaric bombing of Iraq, so the evening kicked off with a speech from the Mariam Appeal, which campaigns against the bombing of Iraq.

Candy Udwin, the Socialist Alliance candidate in Camden in London, spoke about building the protest by connecting it to the numerous local and national struggles against the effects of neo-liberal policies like PFI schemes.

"Seattle was successful. It showed we can stop the free market plans of our rulers. Let's get to Genoa and do it!" said Anna Braga from the Green Party.

Chris Nineham from Globalise Resistance said that they were liaising with the Contra G8 group, the protest organisers in Italy, to get information

Tap a mood

THE LAST week at University College London (UCL) has proved that Globalise Resistance is turning into a movement that is alive and real.

Last Monday Globalise Resistance was a loose but small coalition. We started a petition against Glaxo-SmithKline, and by the end of the week the group had grown into a list of over 200 people.

This movement is massive. We must tap into it, mould it and benefit from it, but we must not attempt to dominate it.

● **Steve Smith**

"Seattle was successful. Let's go to Genoa and do it!"

about the planning of the blockades and other actions.

A short discussion about Genoa raised a number of issues around the protest, which were then raised in the seven workshops that followed.

They included fundraising, publicity, media work and transport, plus liaising with the groups planning May Day protests.

The groups reconvened to let the meeting know what each had discussed.

It was decided to meet again in three weeks, and also to hold regular organising committee meetings with two people from each subgroup.

A brilliant start to what will be a brilliant protest.

● **Noel Douglas**

■ **Material for these actions is available on the website www.resist.org.uk**

Waiting since 70s

FORTY PEOPLE turned up to the Manchester planning meeting for Genoa.

"I've been waiting for something like this to happen since the 1970s," said Jean, a pensioner who had travelled from Lancashire for the meeting.

We discussed our upcoming protests against the GlaxoSmithKline drugs company and the Gap clothes

PROTESTS LIKE this have taken place in South Africa for cheap AIDS drugs

'Winds of change'

"THE MORE I find out about what's going on in the world, the more I want to do stuff about it," said Sonya, a young film assistant.

Sonya was one of around 300 people who attended the fiftieth anniversary conference of War on Want, the campaign group against world poverty, in London last Saturday.

They came together to discuss how to eradicate world poverty and regulate the free market.

"Over the last 30 years people have tried to reconstruct the world on the basis of the 19th century and allowing the free market to rule," said Larry Elliot, the economics editor of the Guardian.

"This system is unsustainable. Out of the wreckage of the old system we can start to see the emergence of the new. Something out there is changing fundamentally.

The winds of change are beginning to blow."

Campaigners then broke up into a number of workshops to join lively debates and discussions on regulating the capitalist system and supporting workers' movements in the South of the world.

At the final session of the day Clare Short, New Labour's international development secretary, argued that globalisation was reducing world inequality.

She said people who protested against global institutions such as the WTO and IMF could destroy poor people's hopes.

Her defence of the financial institutions shocked many people in the audience. They did not fall for her arguments about globalisation benefiting the poor.

The best answer to Clare Short is for as many people as possible to protest against the G8 in Genoa in July.

Say no to Record

THE *DAILY Record*, a Labour-supporting tabloid in Scotland, has organised a march against drugs on 1 April as part of its "war on drugs" campaign.

Brian Souter, the anti-gay millionaire owner of Stagecoach, is supporting the march.

But two members of the Scottish Socialist Party's youth group wrote a letter to the Scottish *Herald* newspaper exposing the hypocrisy over the "war on drugs".

"We are outraged, but not surprised, that the *Record* would use this crisis in our society as a cynical ploy to increase circulation," wrote Keef Tomkinson and Jo Harvie.

"The *Record*'s 'Charter Against Drugs' does not differentiate between hard and soft drugs. It would have anyone who is

convicted or even suspected of dealing any kind of 'drugs' (we assume it doesn't include tobacco or alcohol) made homeless and their assets confiscated.

"The charter demands that government money should fund 'anti-drugs' HQs in every community to help people campaign to drive dealers out'.

"We believe that the money would be better spent on reopening community centres closed as a result of massive cuts in council funding under Labour and the Tories.

"For every heroin-related death that occurs while the politicians and the media spout the same old populist propaganda, they must accept they have blood on their hands."

The £5.32 billion profits from death

THE GIANT drugs company GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) made £5.32 billion profits last year—around £14 million a day—while millions of AIDS victims across Africa and Latin America cannot afford to buy its AIDS treatment drugs.

GSK has refused to allow local manufacturers to make cheap copies of

its drugs. Its sales of AIDS drugs rose to £1.15 billion last year. Only £114 million came from countries outside the US and Europe.

Drugs companies are pushing ahead with their court case on 5 March against the South African government, to stop the production of cheap drugs to help AIDS victims.

PROTEST OUTSIDE GlaxoSmithKline

Monday 5 March, 8-10am

Great West Road, Brentford, Middlesex

Syon Lane ➔, regular trains from Waterloo station

For more information contact Globalise Resistance on 07956 681 328

Prepare for all out postal war

"NEXT TIME there's an unofficial strike in the post we will sack those who have led it and encouraged it."

That is what Post Office bosses warned leaders of the CWU union at the end of last week.

They (and the New Labour ministers who stand behind them) are taking a huge gamble if they go ahead with their threat.

As the reports on this page show, there are still strikes almost every day in the post. Most of them are unofficial and illegal. And most of them win.

Management is enraged that it cannot force through the "flexibility" and speed-ups that it wants to rack up still more profit.

The government is nervous that militant and hard-hitting strikes could sink its plans for privatisation by the back door through joint ventures and other schemes.

So at some point there is very likely to be a full scale confrontation.

The early clashes have already started.

In Cardiff, Liverpool and Oxford (twice), Royal Mail provoked unofficial strikes and then tried to isolate the offices concerned.

In each case postal workers across Britain delivered the solidarity to stop the strikes being strangled. Instead the strikers notched up wins.

Management hopes the

by **CHARLIE KIMBER**

CWU union leaders will curb their members. They may try but they will not find it easy.

CWU members have to prepare to fight. In some offices workers have already prepared strike committees.

These committees should link up and plan now how to fight.

There is also an important political argument. In a national strike the question of relations with Labour will be prominent.

Core

It will be much easier to fight if a solid core of postal workers are won to the Socialist Alliance and can put forward a left alternative, both in terms of militancy and politics.

Around 250 people have signed forms to withdraw from paying the political levy in one CWU branch in the south of England.

Rather than simply drop out from the levy, it would be better to demand that, if the members decide, the money can be used for left wing parties



WATFORD PICKETS were in a confident mood on Monday

that represent CWU policy rather than only for the Labour Party.

This is a big debate already raging in the union. It is time to organise now for a political and industrial challenge.

Winning strikes

ALMOST 1,000 postal workers in Watford struck officially for 24 hours on Monday in a dispute over shifts and breaks.

From this week Watford postal workers will have to ask their supervisor for permission to go to the toilet and will be denied the right to smoke or get a cup of tea outside officially designated periods.

Bosses also want to end shift rotations and leave staff on the same shift all the time.

CWU branch secretary Alan Walsh says, "Rotations are very important to staff as the shift patterns vary so much and some are very anti-social. Rotations ensure staff have at least some time with their families."

"Staff also choose to work different shift patterns (some of which get overtime) to enhance their earnings—the basic is only £12,700 a year."

"We're also angry about the way these changes have been brought in. They are draconian and belong in another era."

A further strike is planned from 12 noon on Thursday 8 March to 6pm on Saturday 10 March.

AROUND 300 CWU members stopped work at the Springburn centre in Glasgow last week in a dispute over pay.

The walkout ended only when managers agreed to emergency talks with the union.

The dispute centred on drivers who work on forklifts one week in every four. They are paid £6 a month extra, but say they should get £18.

POSTAL WORKERS in Stamford Hill, east London, walked out unofficially for the second time last week because of deadly asbestos in their office.

"I do not trust any of these managers with our safety. They would let us work up to our necks in a plague pit if they could get away with it," one Stamford Hill CWU member told *Socialist Worker*.

POST OFFICE Network (PON) management has conceded almost all of the demands made by counter staff in the dispute over the unagreed use of agency labour.

Last Christmas PON recruited 250 workers from the Blue Arrow agency.

In response staff walked out unofficially at 60 London branch offices in October.

The Post Office is so alarmed by possible strike action that it has offered a deal which effectively gives CWU reps the ability to keep agency staff out of offices.

ROYAL MAIL delivery workers reluctantly accepted a 3.2 percent pay deal by 66 percent to 34 percent.

Over 27,000 voted to reject the offer, but the majority accepted that other issues—such as privatisation—are more immediately pressing if there is going to be a national strike.

Solid strike at Vauxhall

Now what next?

VAUXHALL workers struck for the day last week against the closure of the Luton plant by giant US multinational General Motors.

Luton strikers were joined by workers at the Ellesmere Port plant who also had a solid one-day strike.

Socialists, the media, two local Labour MPs and the regional TGWU official swelled the small number of pickets at Luton.

Workers argued, "You won't have a job if you keep on doing what management tell you to do!" with workers who crossed the picket lines, mainly MSF members who voted against action.

A good number of cars were turned away as a result. Many AEEU members also stayed away from work.

The question on everyone's lips is, "What next?"

"I wish I knew the answer to that," was the most common reply last week, including from shop stewards.

"We have let things cool down too much," said one. "We should have started moving things on."

Another said, "Our officials are carrying on talking. They are trying to get the whole plant turned into an IBC van plant. But there is no sign of the company



Picture: JESS HURD

accepting that."

The IBC van plant—owned by GM—is next to the Vauxhall plant.

Vauxhall worker Steve Minter says, "They have combined two shifts together, laid off 1,000 of us for six weeks, and are dangling the carrot of another £2,000 if we transfer to IBC vehicles."

"I think they want to get people there by the election so that things are done and dusted. From 20 April we will have no shift or premium allowance. That means losing £60 to £100 a week. "I've been here 12 years.

Where does my future lie?"

Luton worker Keith says, "The union is not doing enough. It is being too sweet, too cosy. But there is nothing sweet and cosy about a plant closure."

"Just having meetings and calling a few one-day strikes is not enough to stop closure. We need direct action."

"I want more militant shop stewards. I want people representing me who talk the way I feel."

"Ford started this, closing Dagenham. If Vauxhall get away with it, somebody else will do it next."

inside the system

THINGS THEY SAY

"A financial monster."

■GlaxoSmithKline drugs multinational boss JEAN-PIERRE GARNIER describing his own company

"THE Socialist Alliance looks fresh and exciting."

■Pro-Blair Guardian columnist JOHN O'FARRELL

"WE HAD to get the programme started. We had to create a market in the Private Finance Initiative because there was not a market."

■Health secretary ALAN MILBURN on PFI in the NHS

"I'M THE hardest working person I know. I only go to about three parties a week."

■"Socialite" LADY VICTORIA HERVEY

"SUITABLE for vegetarians."

■Interesting advice on WALKERS SMOKY BACON FLAVOUR CRISPS

"HOW DO you put an estimate on a six-foot hamster? We don't sell too many of those."

■Auctioneer DEREK SADLER on problems with selling off the contents of the Millennium Dome

"THE FACT is I have no vices."

■PETER MANDELSON, ex cabinet minister

"THERE'S no reward for loyalty. It's run like a business."

■BUCKINGHAM PALACE WORKER on news that royal staff are not to get the medal they were expecting for the queen's jubilee

"HER LIFE has gone as normal while mine has been ruined by one incident in which I did everything correctly."

■ARTHUR HARRIOT, ticket inspector who charged Cherie Blair a £10 penalty fare for not having a ticket...and who has now been sacked by Thameslink

"SIX AND a half million people have visited the Dome and six and a half left happy."

■Honest admission by P-Y GERBEAU, head of the Dome

DO YOU have a story for Inside the System? Send it to Inside the System, Socialist Worker, PO Box 82 London E3 3LH



Business fails to turn green

BUSINESS IS digging its heels in over global warming—just as a new United Nations report last week warned of even greater disasters if nothing is done.

A survey by the Business in the Environment corporate body found that companies are making a "pitiful" contribution to tackling global warming by reducing their emissions of greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide.

●Almost two thirds of companies have not even set targets for reducing emissions.

●One third of all companies do not even measure their emissions.

●Even on its own measure the corporate sector's performance on tackling global warming had fallen by 9 percent in the last year.

Meanwhile it has also emerged that the bosses' CBI organisation is pressing the government to further relax the Climate Change Levy in the forthcoming budget.

The levy was supposed to tax the companies with the worst record of greenhouse gas emissions.

Chancellor Gordon Brown has already allowed many off the hook by making it possible for some to claim 80 percent discounts.

The CBI wants the criteria for claiming the discount to be made even easier.

Vote winner?

DONCASTER Labour council is showing just how to woo disillusioned Labour voters.

Council leader Colin Wedd issued a memo warning fellow councillors to be "careful" to help ensure "maximum support" among Labour voters in the general election.

Within days of the memo Wedd announced that he wanted £800 paid from council funds to go on a five day "fact finding" mission to...a horse race meeting in Pisa in Italy.

This was quickly followed by the announcement of a 7.9 percent rent rise for council tenants and plans to sack 280 wardens in local elderly people's homes.

Private bonanza

BIG BUSINESS is already gearing up for what it hopes will be a privatisation bonanza under a New Labour government after the election.

Giant investment bank Merrill Lynch has formed a specialist "public affairs" unit to lobby for privatisation.

The bank appointed Gill Christopher-Cambers as the second in command.

The double-barrelled banker has spent the last four years as the manager of Tony Blair's political office.

Before that he worked for troubled Labour MP Keith Vaz.

Head of the Merrill Lynch lobbying unit is Miles Webber.

He sat on the board of foreign secretary Robin Cook's think tank, the Foreign Policy Centre.

Merrill Lynch internal reports are drooling over what they see as the prospect of the mass privatisation of education services.

This will take place under the GATS trade agreement, supported by Blair.

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

●COMPUTER technician Michael Collins was recently fined £235 and given four penalty points on his licence for doing 78 mph in a 50 mph zone on the A3.

●Chauffeur Tony Peach was not prosecuted at all when caught doing the same 78 mph on the same stretch of road.

Oh...Peach is a police chauffeur and in the back of his vehicle sat Denis O'Connor, chief constable of Surrey.

comment

Turkish lira free market's latest victim

TURKEY HAS become the latest country to fall victim to the whirlwind of financial speculation.

A huge outflow of money forced the government of Bülent Ecevit to announce on Thursday of last week that it was allowing the Turkish currency, the lira, to float freely on the foreign exchange markets. Within two days the lira had been devalued by 36 percent.

This wasn't supposed to happen. Turkey had been accepted as a full candidate for membership of the European Union.

The government had agreed a programme of economic "reforms" with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

One bewildered banker said, "This is the equivalent of something falling from outer space."

Ecevit himself is getting the blame. On Monday of last week a full scale row developed between Ecevit and the Turkish president, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, at a meeting of the National Security Council. Sezer accused the government of blocking investigations into corruption. Ecevit stormed out of the meeting and issued an angry statement.

The financial markets then went into freefall. That day Turkey suffered the biggest outflow of money in its history. By Wednesday of last week overnight interest rates had reached over 4,000 percent in a desperate effort to stem the flight of capital.

Panic

A row among elderly politicians couldn't on its own provoke such a panic. Deeper forces were at work, reflecting the divisions in Turkish society.

The IMF programme involved neo-liberal "reforms" designed to open Turkey up to the world market. These require dismantling many of the state-controlled structures of national capitalism built up since Kemal Atatürk set up the Turkish republic in the early 1920s.

As ex-diplomat Ozdem Sanberk put it, "We are talking about overhauling national society in its entirety. But that is shaking the very structures of society and the people who use those structures."

According to the *Financial Times*, "Opposition to the reforms has been growing not just in the ranks of the government and the bureaucracy, but also from the business sector. Apart from those who believe in continued state control of the economy. There is a powerful 'inflation lobby', accustomed to making its living from high interest rates and inefficiently awarded state tenders financed by runaway government spending."

The IMF programme also made the Turkish economy more vulnerable to financial speculation.

Turkish banks borrowed heavily abroad to finance their loans to the government and companies. Some 70 percent of Turkey's \$110 billion debt is commercial debt—

“The IMF programme also made the Turkish economy more vulnerable to financial speculation”

European banks loaned them nearly half. German banks alone lent \$12.118 billion.

But Stanley Fischer, the IMF's deputy managing director, flew into Ankara in the middle of last week's crisis.

He is reported to have told Ecevit, "Either you agree to float the currency or there is nothing to talk about."

This inevitably led to the massive devaluation that has now taken place. He ruled out lending Turkey any more money.

This is simply the latest in a series of financial crises to have hit individual so-called "emerging markets" over the past decade—Mexico 1994-5, East Asia 1997-8, Russia 1998 and Brazil 1999. A few months ago there was widespread concern about Argentina.

In each case the pattern is the same.

The government adopts neo-liberal policies—privatisation, deregulation, cutting public expenditure—conforming to the "Washington consensus" enforced by the IMF, World Bank, and the US Treasury.

Inflow

Speculative capital pours into the country, attracted by expectations of a quick profit.

The inflow helps to fuel, if not a boom, then at least the expansion of some sectors of the economy.

Then something happens to scare the foreign investors—an economic setback or, as in the Turkish case, a political crisis, and panic sets in.

Money floods out as quickly as it entered in the first place. And the IMF steps in to protect the interests of the speculators.

It imposes a standard "rescue" package that always includes devaluation along with yet more neo-liberal measures.

The Turkish crisis underlines the fragility of the free market capitalism that currently dominates the world. It also dramatises its inhumanity.

The price of last week's panic will be paid not by the foreign speculators or the Turkish ruling class, but by workers and peasants in the shape of lost jobs and lower living standards.

■ALEX CALLINICOS

BLAIR MEETS BUSH

They said bombs would save Kurds

Poverty in heart of West

WHILE Blair and Bush were discussing how the world can spend more money on arms, a new report revealed the outrageous levels of child poverty inside their own countries.

Russia is top of the league for child poverty amongst the advanced industrialised nations, with 26.6 percent of children living below the poverty line.

But the US is a close second, with 26.3 percent of its children in poverty.

And Britain is third with 21.3 percent in poverty.

The report found even more shocking evidence of child poverty in specific US states.

In New York, California, Massachusetts and Arizona the rate of child poverty rivals Russia.

Single mothers in the US have the highest levels of poverty in the industrialised world, with nearly 60 percent raising their children in poverty.

TONY BLAIR met George Bush last week.

Their so called “special relationship” is sealed in blood. The day before they met US and British planes were again bombing Iraq.

They bombed the northern “no-fly zone” just under a week after bombing Baghdad. Blair and Bush say the bombing raids are carefully targeted.

But the US Pentagon admits over half the “satellite guided” bombs they dropped a week ago missed their targets.

Only 38 to 40 percent hit their targets. The vast majority missed by as much as 100 or 150 feet.

So where did the bombs land? On houses? On people?

Bush claimed the bombings were a success because they were designed to let Saddam Hussein know that the Bush administration would remain engaged in the Gulf. “We got his attention,” said Bush.

Bush also told reporters, “Britain is our strongest friend and closest ally.”

He is right. Blair has bent over backwards to the new right wing Republican president of the US.

This is despite the fact that Bush risks beginning a brand new global arms race with his National Missile Defence (NMD) plan.

Blair was the first European leader to visit Bush.

He tried to cast himself as the world leader who will negotiate between the US and Europe, whose leaders are not happy about NMD.

Blair says the rest of the world needs to “understand and share” US

by SAM ASHMAN

anxieties about defence.

“I personally believe it is possible to find a way through this that meets American concerns, and also meets the concerns of other members of NATO, and Russia and other countries,” he said.

“I think the way the administration is handling it is the right way.”

Force

Similarly Robin Cook, the foreign secretary, said, “The most important aspect of this must be making sure that the other players in the international scene are consulted, particularly Russia.”

In return Bush gave his blessing to the establishment of a European defence force within NATO, as long as NATO continues to “be the primary way to keep the peace in Europe”, as long as there is “joint command”, and as long as NATO members bolster their defence budgets.

In other words, as long as the US stays boss.

...but refuse entry to these Kurdish refugees

protect Kurds.”

That is how Louise Christian, human rights lawyer and prospective Socialist Alliance candidate for Hornsey and Wood Green in north London, summed up the British government’s hypocrisy.

Over 900 Iraqi and Turkish Kurds were rescued from a sinking hulk off the French Riviera last week.

They had endured eight days in “undescrivable” and “deplorable” conditions, packed like animals into the holds, half starved and surrounded by their own excrement.

“They looked like zombies,” said one French aid worker. “They had not seen the light for a week. It was a scene of total horror.”

Escape

Some had paid as much as £2,500 to escape Iraq. The captain and crew then abandoned the ship off the coast of France. Only mild weather stopped an even worse disaster.

The *Sun* launched a disgusting campaign against these desperate people.

The front page of the *Sun* last Friday said, “Kurds On Way”.

The paper’s editorial said, “Jack Straw said he’d send them back—now’s his chance to do it. Look at the families we feature in the paper today. They are quite clearly coming here to get benefits. Straw must act.”

The day before the *Sun* claimed there was “outrage over refugee mob 1,000 strong”. The *Daily Mail* said, “Eurotunnel yesterday begged ministers to send in

the Gurkhas to deter the hordes of would-be asylum seekers trying to enter Britain.”

Nearly every Iraqi Kurd who applies for asylum in Britain is refused.

If the government really wanted rights for the people of Iraq it would allow Iraqi asylum seekers into Britain, drop the sanctions against Iraq and end the bombing.

Cook’s swipe at Swinney

THE LEADER of the Scottish National Party (SNP), John Swinney, last week rightly attacked the bombings of Iraq.

He said, “I don’t support the bombings. I don’t understand how bombings will be part of an effective solution.”

“We have been here before and these bombings have not led to an improvement in the situation. It is very clear that there have been civilian casualties, and that gives us enormous concern.”

Foreign secretary Robin Cook issued a disgusting attack on Swinney in reply.

He said Swinney would only “encourage Saddam Hussein”, and accused the SNP of being “motivated by political opportunism, not a political concern for the people of Iraq”.

This is from a man who supports the sanctions which kill 4,000 to 5,000 Iraqis every month.

Police battle workers in S Korea

OVER 4,000 riot police stormed into a Daewoo Motors plant in South Korea last week.

They stormed the building to smash up a four day long sit-in by 700 sacked workers and their families fighting for their jobs.

The security forces broke down barricades with forklift trucks and excavators.

Many workers were viciously beaten and 76 were taken away for questioning. The police detained seven union leaders.

Riot police also smashed up demonstrations in solidarity with the workers outside the Puyong plant just outside the capital, Seoul.

Heavy fighting continued the following day between the riot police and Daewoo workers, this time joined by students.

The occupation began when the company announced 1,750 sackings, including many important union activists and militants in the plant.

MOBILE PHONE MASTS

is ur brain
2 b tried?

MOBILE PHONE companies all over Britain are taking part in a mad scramble to throw up transmitter masts before laws are passed which might inconvenience them.

Soon they will need to apply for planning permission and—to their horror—possibly face some measure of democratic control over their activities.

A recent report by law firm Nabarro Nathansan and property consultants Telecom Estates estimated that Britain currently has 22,000 sites with transmitters and that a further 40,000 will be installed over the next three years.

Densely populated urban areas will need a phone cell every 500 yards.

A rational way to deal with the questions this raises would be to have a socially owned, socially controlled industry which listened to ordinary people, listened to independent scientific research and avoided duplication of masts because of different commercial interests.

Instead the whole process has been driven by multinational corporations, and the lack of regulations has been a gift to them.

The companies have rights of compulsory purchase. Under current planning regulations, no consultation is necessary and so it hardly ever takes place.

The equipment is needed because of the explosive growth in cellular communications technology. The universal mobile telephone system (UMTS) enables transmission of huge amounts of information. It is estimated that over the next decade 90 percent of all electronic communications which currently travel by landline will be carried out through cellular networks.

These work through radio frequency (RF) transmissions and generate the same form of electromagnetic radiation as microwave ovens. British safety standards only take into account the “thermal effects” of the radiation—how much it heats you up. Biological effects are not considered.

Growth

The only thing scientists seem to agree on is that the evidence for harmful effects from base station radiation is inconclusive.

According to the government’s Stewart report last year, “There is now some preliminary scientific evidence that exposure to RF radiation may cause subtle effects on biological functions, including those of the brain.

“This does not necessarily mean that health is affected but it is not possible to say that exposure to RF radiation, even at levels below national guidelines, is totally without potential adverse health effects.”

The likelihood is that, the less healthy you are, the more likely you are to be affected—and small children absorb RF

by MIKE ARROWSMITH

GAP's profits come from sweatshops and suffering

'We're worth less than the price of a T-shirt'

PROTESTS ARE to hit the clothes chain Gap next week.

Why Gap? Why next week?

Because next Thursday, 8 March, is International Women’s Day, a day established nearly 100 years ago, inspired by women workers in the New York garment industry, many of who were immigrants.

They struggled to survive the horrible sweatshops but they also fought back and organised.

Today Gap is one of the biggest employers of their modern day equivalents.

Gap workers, often women, often children, toil for up to 15 hours a day and more. They are sexually harassed by their managers. They are sacked when they complain or resist.

Gap gets its clothes made in over 12,000 factories across 42 countries. The locations of its factories are secret, but campaigners, union organisers and workers have tracked them down and exposed the conditions.

Gap’s Russian factory workers—many of them Chinese immigrants—are paid just 11 cents an hour.

Gap workers in Honduras are subjected to forced pregnancy tests, forced overtime which means a 14-hour day, allowed to go

by SAM ASHMAN

to the bathroom only twice in that time, and paid a wage which meets only one third of their basic needs.

Cambodian garment workers making products for Gap were shot at by security guards in June last year when they struck for a pay rise.

Allowances

The manager of a Gap factory in El Salvador sacked 150 workers in 1995 because they wanted a union, and vowed that “blood will flow”.

In September 1999 over 800 workers in Indonesia were sacked by a firm which produces for Gap after a month-long strike. They wanted a pay rise to take them to the minimum wage level, meal allowances and union rights.

This is how Gap makes the khakis, the jeans and the T-shirts that clean-cut models advertise on TV—and which are sold to us for a small fortune.

The protests are about solidarity with these workers, and about exposing a multinational that rips us all off.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN CAMBODIAN TORMENT

GAP CLAIMS it sticks to a strict code of conduct governing its employment practices.

But the BBC’s *Panorama* visited factories in Cambodia, south east Asia, which make clothes for Gap, in October last year.

It found women workers in the capital, Phnom Penh, living four to a room in rat-infested dormitories without running water.

Gap’s “code of conduct” says workers must have one day off in seven. These workers all worked a seven-day week.

One worker, Chan Sophan, said, “They force us to do whatever they want. If we refuse, they make us sign a refusal. After three times they’ll fire us.”

Gap’s “code of conduct” also says workers must not be forced to do overtime.

Seung Pov told the programme makers, “Today I have to work overtime until 10 o’clock at night. I begin at 6.15 in the morning and should finish at 2.15pm but I have to work right through

until 10.15 at night. No matter how hard you try, you cannot refuse.”

Another woman worker told of how she did refuse to do overtime once.

“When I came back the following day to work the manager pulled my hair. He swore at me and said something in a language I didn’t understand.”

Twelve

The workers were paid £8 a week—the legal minimum in Cambodia. “We’re cheaper than the price of a single shirt and I think we’ve been working like hell,” said one.

Gap also says it bans child labour in its factories. *Panorama* spoke to 12 year old and 14 year old workers, also living in shanty towns, who had not seen their parents for months.

Chea Sokhom, who started work at 13, says, “We’re not allowed to sit. We have to work standing up until the end of the shift at 10pm so at meal times

we try to rest by sitting down a little, but when I’m caught I have clothes thrown at me and I’m badly scolded.”

Twelve year old Sun Thyda gets \$40 a month. After rent and food she has nothing left. She cannot send money home to her parents who borrowed money to pay an agent twice that much to get her the job in the first place.

Neil Kearney from the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers’ Federation says:

“Major companies like Gap, Nike, and all those other retailers, have almost a daily presence in these companies. They are greatly concerned with quality. Their quality controllers are there. Their buyers are there.

“They insist on high standards as far as quality is concerned. There’s absolutely no reason why they cannot insist on the same standards for working conditions and why they cannot monitor those on virtually a daily basis.”

INDONESIAN WOMEN working in a Gap sweatshop

The company benefits

●Gap made \$1.1 billion profit in 1999.

●It spent \$550 million on advertising in 1999.

●Chief executive Millard Drexler gets \$172.8 million in salary, bonuses and share options.

●Chairman and company founder Donald Fisher is worth \$8 billion and is one of the 100 richest people in the world.

●Fisher has contributed at least \$220,000 to the Republi-

cans since 1994. He also donated \$45,000 to the Democrats and funds right wing think tanks.

●Clinton appointed him to the US Trade Representatives’ Advisory Council for Trade Negotiations where he helped shape the North American Free Trade Agreement and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) which prize open the world for multinationals like Gap

to exploit.

●Fisher is one of the most powerful unelected figures in San Francisco.

He was the driving force behind plans to sell the Presidio National Park to private development interests, to turn a San Francisco school over to a private corporation, and to privatise the development of a new University of California campus.

Multinationals bring misery

DON’T BIG companies at least bring jobs to the Third World? Doesn’t that employment raise wages and living standards in the long term?

That is what defenders of multinational corporations say.

The claim was repeated in the *Guardian* recently.

“Nicaraguan workers say while their conditions are not great, they would rather have the sales and the jobs they bring,” wrote Charlotte Denny.

She described how Nicaraguan workers picketed the US embassy in Managua recently in favour of free trade and globalisation.

She claimed they wanted an end to campaigns against sweatshop labour because they threaten to cut jobs.

In fact their management forced them to go on the protest after their trade union representatives and hundreds of other workers were sacked after they attempted to win an improved pay deal.

Anita Roddick, the founder of the Body Shop who recently came back from Nicaragua, exposed Denny’s claims.

She wrote to the *Guardian* and explained how the so called picket in favour of free trade was “not a voluntary protest but a carefully orchestrated piece of propaganda by the company owners.

“Workers were ordered to go on the march—if they didn’t they

were threatened with docked wages and attendance bonuses, even the sack.”

Denny also claimed that Nicaraguan garment workers “are getting paid well above the minimum wage”.

But experts calculate that a basic living wage in Nicaragua would be about \$190 a month.

The garment workers are lucky if they get \$140 a month.

Cough

As Roddick says, “They live in mud-floored shacks with no sanitation or direct access to running water. They are paid less than 20 cents for every pair of jeans exported and sold in the US for \$30 or more.”

Campaigning against multinationals like Gap is not about fighting to lose workers’ jobs in the Third World.

It is about standing alongside them as they fight for their rights, as they fight to win decent wages and living conditions, and organise unions, for themselves and their families.

It is about fighting to make Gap cough up from its massive profits.

We can help the fight by exposing the conditions firms like Gap make their workers endure. And in the process we can build the global solidarity we need to beat their system.

Globalise Resistance

Close the GAP

Solidarity with women workers around the world

●SHEFFIELD: Saturday 3 March, 1pm, outside new Gap store, opposite Old Town Hall

●LONDON: Thursday 8 March, 1-7pm, 376 Oxford Street

●MANCHESTER: Thursday 8 March, 4pm, St Anne’s Square

●EDINBURGH: Saturday 10 March, 1pm, Princes Street

●GLASGOW: Saturday 10 March, 1pm, Argyle Street

●LEEDS: Saturday 10 March, 3pm, The Briggate, city centre

Other protests will be taking place around the country. For more information ring 07951 015709.

Celebrate International Women’s Day

Phone: 07956 681 328

E-mail: globaliseresistance@hotmail.com

Website: www.gn.apc.org/globaliseresistance



what socialists say

Greens are not all one colour

AN important component of many recent mobilisations, conferences and protests has been members and supporters of the Green Party.

They helped to build, and spoke at, the successful Globalise Resistance conferences. They are involved in building for the protest planned for July in Genoa, Italy, against the leaders of the G8 countries.

Green Party supporters

Nader’s campaign was one based on mobilising people from below, and its targets were big business and the profit system.

Listening to Nader’s speeches was like listening to a socialist. He talked of class as the key divide in society and denounced the pro-business stance of the main parties.

Just as importantly, he fought against racism and agitated for workers’ rights.

There is, though, a quite different kind of Green.

A glance to continental Europe throws up figures like Joschka Fisher, the Green foreign secretary in Germany’s government.

Fischer has gone from fighting militarism to enthusiastically urging on the NATO bombing in the Balkans. From opposing nuclear power, he is now backing the continuation of nuclear power in Germany.

The Greens are in governments in Germany and France which have attacked pensions and welfare, pushed privatisation and cuddled up to big business.

Socialists, and many Greens, have nothing but contempt for people like Fischer.

We will fight them and their policies as much as those of their government partners in Labour-type parties.

There is a reason for the two souls of the Greens—of Ralph Nader and Joschka Fischer.

It is that everyone who begins by opposing the horrors produced by capitalism at some stage faces a choice.

One route is to see the solution to those horrors as

lying in the power ordinary people have to mobilise to confront the system, and ultimately wrest control of society from below to build a different world.

The other is to seek to work within that system, accom-



commodate to it, even administer it, and look to making deals with those in power. The hope is to tame capitalism.

Green Party MEP Caroline Lucas sums up well why this approach is doomed to failure: “Trying to tame globalisation is like trying to lasso a tiger with a thread of cotton.”

And when that reality dawns, those who have gone down that route end up forgetting any attempt to curb the tiger of capitalism, and instead become its apologists and defenders.

Wherever Greens embrace the soul of Ralph Nader, socialists will stand alongside them in the fight and fraternally discuss issues on which we may have differences.

At the next election we will vote for these left wing Greens where there is no clear socialist candidate standing. But not all Greens agree with left wing views.

In Hackney, east London, for example, the Green Party has gone through a sharp internal debate before deciding on a close vote to affiliate to the Fightback campaign against cuts.

When Greens embrace the soul of Joschka Fischer, we will be with those who mobilise and oppose them. And we will certainly not vote for them.

by PAUL McGARR

Socialist Review

THERE’S SOMETHING IN THE AIR

Is this the start of the fightback? Lindsey German writes on a changed situation

●Pete Morgan looks at the anti-globalisation movement ●The Israeli elections

●Depleted uranium

Plus the IMF, World Bank and the poor; the Turkish hunger strike; how ideas change; and much more



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A counter to BBC TV series

Why we're not all middle class

"IN THE modern world the majority of people could be termed middle class." This is the conclusion of the new TV series *Middle Classes: Their Rise and Sprawl*.

It charts the "middle classes' rise to social dominance" through the 20th century.

The programme claims society has been fundamentally transformed because people now have consumer goods such as fridges, washing machines, TVs and videos.

This is an argument that many media commentators and academics have accepted over the last two decades—that the working class is shrinking and the middle class now controls society.

It is the justification New Labour uses as it loves up to the rich and embraces pro-market policies—that the world has changed and so must the party.

As the TV programme puts it, "At the heart of our society are engineers, businessmen, holiday makers and white collar workers, the products of a century of class mobility."

But if "four fifths of the population are middle class", why are most people in Britain getting less than the average industrial wage?

Some 70 percent of workers get less than the figure the government bandies around for average annual earnings—£21,000.

This means many cannot afford to get a mortgage in "boom time" areas like the south east.

Many people fear losing their job and toppling over into dire poverty.

Workers in Britain work 200 hours more every year than other workers in the European Union.

The problem with the argument that "we're all middle class now" is that it completely misunderstands what class means.



THE WORKING class includes those slogging away in offices

It is not about whether you wear a suit to work, what your accent is, what films or TV programmes you like, or if you go abroad on holiday.

Class is about how modern society is divided in two main groups.

There is the small minority of people who have enough money to sit back and do nothing if they want to.

These people own and have control over the means of producing all the wealth in society.

And there is the mass of people who have to work to make a living, and that work creates profit for the businesses owned by the minority.

Which class you are in determines how much control you have over your life—what choices you can make about your life or if it is dominated by work.

"OUR EPOCH possesses this distinctive feature: it has simplified the class antagonisms, society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other—bourgeoisie and proletariat."

That is how Karl Marx, in the *Communist Manifesto*, described the huge changes brought about by the rise of capitalism during the 19th century.

His description, written over 150 years ago, fits perfectly today.

The ruling class today has far more power than its 19th century ancestors could ever dream of.

The world is dominated by a handful of massive multinational corporations and financial institutions that have developed over the last century.

There is a concentration of huge wealth in the hands of the small minority of people who control these companies and institutions.

The richest three individuals in the world control as much wealth as the 48 poorest countries combined.

At the same time the development of capitalism has created a situation where the working class has become the majority class.

In Marx's day most people lived off the land and there was no country where workers were a majority of the population.

In the last 50 years alone the working class has grown.

There was a 28 percent increase in industrial workers in the top 25 countries between 1950 and 1998.

In South Korea alone there are double the amount of workers that existed in the whole world during Marx's time.

The middle class is the group in between the two major classes in society. It includes people like top managers whose salaries are so large they could really be considered part of the upper class.

There are also those individuals who are genuinely in the middle, like shopkeepers or small businessmen.

They are not waged workers but they have little control over their situation.

There is another group of people commentators describe as middle class—"white collar workers" like teachers, nurses, social workers and office workers.

Sections of these people did have a privileged status at the beginning of the 20th century.

But over the last century these groups have seen attack after attack upon their pay and conditions.

Teachers work long hours for little pay in underfunded schools.

Further education lecturers are paid worse than teachers, face short term contracts in colleges, and could lose their jobs at a moment's notice through funding cuts.

Clerical workers are poorly paid, often non-unionised, and face massive job insecurity.

These groups of workers are now part of the working class alongside those who assemble cars or washing machines on a production line.

MANY PEOPLE point to the Tories' attacks on manufacturing industry in the 1980s and the current threat to steel and car plants, and argue that the working class in Britain is in terminal decline.

But the working class never just consisted of manufacturing workers.

Key groups like bus workers, rail workers and postal workers are a major part of the working class.

Official statistics and sociological surveys often imply that about 30 percent of the population are part of the comfortable middle class.

But their descriptions don't give the true picture.

For example, the Office for National Statistics puts teachers, nurses, midwives, youth workers, actors, journalists and others in its top category, "professional and managerial".

The nurses and midwives who suffer appalling pay and overwork would laugh at the idea of being included in the top social grouping in society.

Most people—around 75 percent of the population—depend on the wage they get from work to survive.

They could be a call centre worker, one of 400,000 slogging away in factory-sized workplaces. This work is similar to any job on a production line.

This is office work at the beginning of the 21st century.

Workers, whether they are in offices, hospitals, schools or factories, have enormous power.

They work alongside one another in similar jobs, are subject to the bosses' will and share the same concerns.

It means workers can come to see that uniting to fight is the only way out of any crisis.

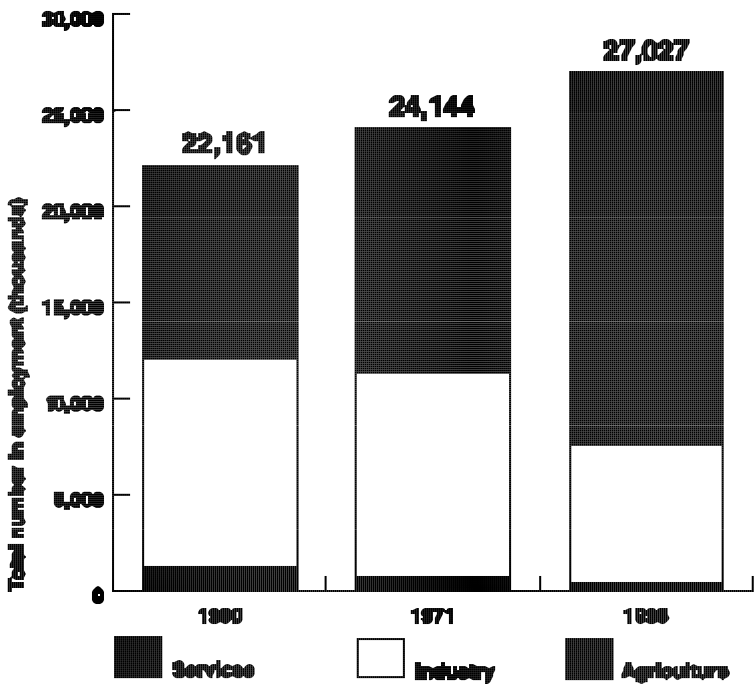
Bosses make their profits by exploiting workers. When workers challenge that exploitation they can bring the whole system to a halt.

Workers in Britain have given a glimpse of this power in the strikes by London's tube workers, Vauxhall car workers, and council workers taking action against cuts.

Marx wrote about capitalism creating its "gravedigger" in the form of the world working class 150 years ago, when the working class was confined to parts of Europe.

Today we can see that class and the power to transform society in every part of the world, including Britain.

Working class in Britain



For more discussion about the class divide in society read

A Question of Class
by Lindsey German

Price £3.50, available from
Bookmarks, phone 020 7637 1848

in my view

A law unto themselves

NEW LABOUR's ten-year crime programme, released on Monday, was full of "get tough" policies.

It centred on 2,500 new prison places, 9,000 more police, allowing juries to see details of a defendant's convictions during a trial, and an army of private security guards backing up the police.

Yet shovelling more people into prison simply does not work as a way to cut crime.

Britain has the highest number of prisoners per head of the population in Western Europe. However, it also has one of the highest crime rates in the industrialised world.

Only 3 percent of crimes lead to conviction, so sentencing has hardly any effect.

If you want to know the general level of crime in a society, look at the rate of unemployment.

Even before 1997, under the Tories, crime fell for four years in a row because unemployment was falling. It has kept falling for most offences for the same reason.

Yet Labour continues to peddle its hard policies aimed at *Daily Mail* editorial writers.

New Labour wants to cram more people into overcrowded jails that teach minor criminals to get worse.

It is not even true that most people are blood-thirsty for harsher treatment.

The British Crime Survey found victims believe by two to one that non-custodial sentences are better than prison for offences such as burglary and street theft.

It also found the thought of an offender being sent to prison deters some people from reporting crimes.

Social experiment

The real reason for crime is the alienation and poverty in society. During the 1980s Britain went through a fiercely cruel social experiment—Thatcherism.

Everything that smacked of compassion and caring was derided and cut. Tory prime minister Margaret Thatcher summed up the mood when she said, "There is no such thing as society."

Young people came under special pressure. They faced 25 to 50 percent unemployment in places, while the Tories took away their benefits and slashed social facilities. Some took to crime.

Tony Blair's slogan of "Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" partly recognised that crime was a social product.

But Blair and Jack Straw have forgotten the second half of the slogan.

Incredibly, the prison population is now 6,000 higher than under the Tories.

If we want to cut crime, we need to cut poverty and alienation, and build a more compassionate society. Certainly we don't need to give any more power to the police.

A remarkable survey by the police-loving *Sunday Telegraph* revealed that police vehicles are involved in up to 1,000 crashes a month, despite claims that new safety controls have been introduced.

Home Office records show 406 accidents in London alone between September and December last year.

Broadcaster Sheena McDonald, who is only just recovering from severe injuries she received after being run over by a police van two years ago, says, "Despite all the talk of improved driver training, things have, if anything, got worse. It seems the police are not accountable to anyone on this issue."

A leaked extract of a report commissioned by the Association of Chief Police Officers last year concluded that policemen often ignore driving instructions.

Joyriding? Life-threatening jobs? Start with the man in a vehicle with a flashing blue light.

by CHARLIE KIMBER

film

LIAM (right) grows up in a time of growing dole queues in the depression

Snapshot of 1930s

LIAM is set in working class Liverpool during the depression of the 1930s.

by NIGEL DAVEY

It is one of a number of recent films, such as *Billy Elliott* and *Ratcatcher*, which attempt to realistically portray social conditions and working class life.

The script is by Jimmy McGovern—who wrote excellent TV dramas about the Hillsborough tragedy and the Liverpool dockers.

And it stars Ian Hart, who was also in Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom*.

The Liam of the film's title is the seven year old son of the Sullivan family struggling to survive the depression, at a time when there was no welfare state.

When Liam's dad—a skilled shipbuilder—is laid off from the docks, the family are plunged into a nightmare of scrabbling to find

food and rent money as the debts rise.

He is faced with daily humiliation, forced to beg for a day's work and to survive on the wages of his children.

He becomes increasingly embittered and blames foreigners, mainly the Irish, for his plight.

He sinks and drifts into the British Union of Fascists (BUF).

Liam attends a Catholic school and is drilled daily about the sins of the flesh where redemption is only possible through submission to the church.

One such "sin" causes Liam to lose the ability to speak properly.

Yet the sins of the father are greater.

He becomes a fully

fledged fascist Blackshirt, and cannot take the fact that his daughter is a maid to a rich Jewish household.

This is the film's climax, but it is also its weakness.

Although the BUF did attract some workers like Sullivan, its members were mainly small businessmen.

The backbone of the BUF was the people the revolutionary Leon Trotsky described as "human dust", crushed between workers and big business.

Another problem is that the only Jews in the film are stereotypes—the rich boss, the pawnbroker and the rent collector.

Only the elder son, who attends socialist meetings, offers any hint of the struggle of workers against fascism in the 1930s.

The film is well scripted, with wonderful actors, but unfortunately gives us little insight into the dark era of the depression.

book

The underbelly of the jet set

by NAINA KENT

MOTH SMOKE, a new novel by Moshin Hamid, is set in the border city of Lahore, Pakistan, in 1998.

Electricity is in short supply, temperatures are over 120 degrees and nuclear testing is a common occurrence.

The novel exposes the underbelly of the young corrupt elite in Pakistan, whose wealth comes from drug trafficking, foreign bank accounts and gun-running.

Daru, the central character, has been sacked by his bank and looks un-

likely to get another job.

He does not have a foreign degree and no bank or multinational will employ him without one.

His loss coincides with the return of Ozi, his childhood friend.

Ozi, the son of a corrupt civil servant, throws a party for Lahore's jet-set young rich, complete with "sushi flown in from Karachi".

Daru is desperate to fit in, but begins to realise he never will unless he has wealth behind him.

His life gets increasingly out of control against the background of a crumbling economy and mounting right wing political pressure to have and use nuclear arms.

Poverty

Pakistan has a foreign debt of \$36 billion. Two thirds of its budget is geared to debt servicing and defence spending, while there are staggering levels of poverty.

As one character puts it, "This nuclear race is no joke—poor people are in trouble."

Moth Smoke is part of a new generation of writing that is different in style from Salman Rushdie's magical realism.

The language is brutally clear in style and it is a refreshing and insightful read.

preview

NEIL MacGREGOR'S PRIVATE VIEW (Sat, BBC2, 7pm). The director of the National Gallery in London illustrates the political history of 19th century Germany using masterpieces on tour from the National Gallery in Berlin.

EARTH STORY (Sun, 7.05pm, BBC2). This documentary explains why the earth is a living planet.

BREMNER, BIRD AND FORTUNE (Sun, 9pm, C4). A comic look at current events.

PANORAMA (Sun, 10.15pm, BBC1). Exposing the links between successive governments and the millionaire Hinduja brothers involved in Peter Mandelson's resignation.

WALL STREET (Sun, 10.55pm, BBC1). Film by Oliver Stone, set in the world of high finance.

play

Don't miss Brecht play on tour

ONE OF the greatest political plays of the 20th century is on tour across Britain in the coming weeks.

If you have the chance to go, don't miss it.

The Good Woman of Setzuan was written by the socialist playwright Bertolt Brecht in 1942.

Brecht was a committed socialist who was active in Germany in the 1920s and forced into exile as the Nazis came to power in the 1930s.

He is widely recognised as one of the most important and original playwrights of the last century.

The National Theatre's new production of *The Good Woman of Setzuan* deals with what translator Tanika Gupta describes as "the question of whether or not it is possible to remain good in a society based on greed".

True to Brecht's own emphasis, this production draws the audience to actively participate and think about the issues raised.

Director Stephen Powell insists the play is about "the Britain we have inherited and have ourselves created. Thatcher's 'no such thing as society', as well as current political rhetoric, rings loud and clear in this piece."

■The Good Woman of Setzuan is in Manchester 27 February to 3 March (details 0161 274 0600), Warwick 6-10 March (01926 419 555), Harrogate 13-17 March (01423 502 116), London 20-22 March (020 7452 3000), Norwich 27-31 March (01603 598 598), Brecon 3-7 April (01874 611 622), London again 19-26 April, Worthing 1-5 May (01903 606 162), London again 11-14 May, Truro 22-26 May (01872 262 466). Full details on www.nationaltheatre.org.uk

where
we
stand

INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS ACTION

The workers create all the wealth under capitalism. A new society can only be constructed when they collectively seize control of that wealth and plan its production and distribution.

REVOLUTION NOT REFORM

The present system cannot be patched up or reformed as the established Labour and trade union leaders say. It has to be overthrown.

THERE IS NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD

The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class.

They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against the workers.

The working class needs an entirely different kind of state—a workers' state based upon councils of workers' delegates and a workers' militia.

At most parliamentary activity can be used to make propaganda against the present system.

Only the mass action of the workers themselves can destroy the system.

INTERNATIONALISM

The struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle.

We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries.

We oppose everything which turns workers from one country against those from other countries.

We oppose racism and imperialism. We oppose all immigration controls. We support the right of black people and other oppressed groups to organise their own defence.

We support all genuine national liberation movements.

The experience of Russia demonstrates that a socialist revolution cannot survive in isolation in one country. In Russia the result was state capitalism, not socialism.

In Eastern Europe and China a similar system was later established by Stalinist parties.

We support the struggle of workers in these countries against both private and state capitalism.

We are for real social, economic and political equality of women.

We are for an end to all forms of discrimination against lesbians and gays.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To achieve socialism the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party. Such a party can only be built by activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests.

We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

We urge all those who agree with our policies to join with us in the struggle to build the revolutionary party.

Socialist Workers Party special meetings for all members and supporters

Socialists and the general election

Glasgow: Wed 7 Mar, 7.30pm, City Halls, Albion St.

Edinburgh: Thu 8 Mar, 7.30pm, Blind Poet, West Nicholson St.

Manchester: Tues 6 Mar, 7pm, Mechanics Institute, Princes St.

Merseyside: Sun 4 Mar, 1pm, YMCA, Mount Pleasant, Liverpool.

Lancashire: Wed 7 Mar, 8pm, Blackburn Library, Blackburn.

Sheffield & South Yorkshire: Mon 5 Mar, 7pm, Central United

Reformed Church, Norfolk St (opp Crucible), Sheffield.

Tyneside: Mon 5 Mar, 7.30pm, Unemployed Centre, Bigg Market, Newcastle.

Coventry: Sun 4 Mar, 6pm, Four Princes, Allesley Old Rd.

Birmingham: Wed 7 Mar, 7pm, Friends Institute, Moseley Rd.

Leeds: Mon 5 Mar, 7.30pm, Adelphi, Hunslett Rd.

South Wales: Wed 7 Mar, 7.30pm, Star

Leisure Centre, Splott Rd, Cardiff.

Bristol: Wed 7 Mar, 7.30pm, Kuumba Centre, Hepburn Rd.

Plymouth: Sun 11 Mar, 2pm, Ballard Centre, The Crescent.

Brighton: Wed 7 Mar, 8pm, St Peter's Church Hall, York Pl.

Southampton & Portsmouth: Thu 8 Mar, 7.30pm, African Caribbean Centre, Trinity Rd, Southampton.

Home Counties: Thu 8 Mar, 8pm, Fleetville

Community Centre, Royal Rd, St Albans.

Norwich: Sun 4 Mar, 2pm, Unemployed Workers Centre, Oak St.

Essex & Suffolk: Sun 4 Mar, 12.30pm, Manor Ballroom, Cubbald St, Ipswich.

East London: Wed 7 Mar, 8pm, Bryant St Methodist Centre, Stratford.

North London: Tues 6 Mar, 7pm, West Indian Cultural Centre, Clarendon Rd.

Hackney: Mon 5 Mar, 7.30pm, Stamford Hill

Library, Portland Ave. Central London: Tues 6 Mar, 7pm, SOAS, off Malet St.

West London: Wed 7 Mar, 7pm, Hammersmith Irish Centre, Blacks Rd.

Waltham Forest: Tue 4 Mar, 7.30pm, Leytonstone Library, Church Lane.

South East London & Kent: Mon 5 Mar, 7.30pm, Charlton Hse (cnr Charlton Rd/Hornfair Rd).

South London: Tues 6 Mar, 7.30pm, Walworth Methodist Centre, Camberwell Rd.

VOTE SOCIALIST

Back this campaign



SOCIALIST candidates will be standing in constituencies across England, Scotland and Wales at the general election. Some of those where a decision to stand has already been taken are listed here, along with candidates where they have already been selected. In some areas candidates are being selected in the coming week and decisions being taken on whether to stand. Everyone who can should get involved in the fight to make sure the socialist message comes over loud and clear in the election.

Plymouth Devonport

Tony Staunton

Exeter

Fran Choules

Southampton Itchen

Southampton Test

Portsmouth South

John Molyneux

Hove

Andy Richards

Bristol South

Brian Drummond

Bristol East

Streatham

Greg Tucker

Vauxhall

Theresa Bennett

Peckham and Camberwell

John Mulrenan

Greenwich and Woolwich

Kirstie Paton

Lewisham Deptford

Ian Page

Brent South

Tottenham

Weyman Bennett

Hornsey and Wood Green

Louise Christian

Poplar and Canning Town

Kambiz Boomla

Dagenham



Berlyne Hamilton

Leyton and Wanstead

Hackney South

Cecilia Prosper

Holborn and St Pancras

Candy Udwin

Islington South

Janine Booth

Ealing Acton and Shepherd's Bush

Nick Grant

Ipswich

Peter Leech

Norwich South

Dave Manningham

Cambridge

Luton South

Joe Hearne

Watford

Jon Berry

Oxford East

John Lister

Stevenage

Walsall South

Walsall North

Dave Church

Dudley South

Angela Thompson

Telford

Mike Jeffries

Coventry South

Rob Windsor

Coventry North East

Dave Nellist

Birmingham Perry Barr



Caroline Johnson

Birmingham Northfield

Leicester West

Steve Score

Leicester East

Nottingham East

Peter Radcliff

Ashfield

Chesterfield

Jeannie Robinson

Sheffield Brightside

Brian Wilson

Sheffield Central

Nick Riley

Huddersfield East

Graham Hellawell

Wakefield

Mick Griffiths

Hull North

Leeds Central

Steve Johnston

Bradford South

Ateeq Siddique

Manchester Withington

John Clegg

Manchester Blackley



Karen Reissmann

Salford

Liverpool Bootle

Peter Glover

Liverpool Wavertree

Mark O'Brien

Liverpool Riverside

Cathy Wilson

Wigan

Dave Lowe

Blackburn

Mark Tebbutt

Darlington

Alan Doherty

Middlesbrough

Tyne Bridge

Terry Rogers

Tyneside North

Pete Bartlett

Cardiff Central

Julian Goss

Cardiff South and Penarth

Dave Bartlett

Torfaen

Steve Bell

Swansea West

Alec Thraves

Time to change gear

THE FOLLOWING resolution was passed at last Sunday's national meeting of delegates from SWP branches:

THE GENERAL election presents revolutionary socialists with a magnificent opportunity to build a left focus for the sense of disillusionment and betrayal with New Labour. This requires us to throw all our efforts into campaigning for the Socialist Alliances in England and Wales, and the Scottish Socialist Party in Scotland.

The main stress in our electoral agitation must be on mobilising other people to campaign for and vote for the socialist candidates.

Our members in constituencies where socialist candidates are not standing should try to mobilise people to campaign in nearby constituencies where there are socialist candidates.

For our Scottish comrades, in every constituency where we have members we should approach the local Scottish Socialist Party branch to organise election campaign meetings, activities and fundraising, with a view to involving all those who are looking for an alternative to New Labour's neo-liberal agenda.

The level of disillusionment with New Labour among the best people in the working class and anti-capitalist movements is such that the centre of our agitation in these constituencies can in no way centre on the question of voting Labour.

Forward

There will be cases in which candidates not belonging to the Socialist Alliances or the SSP will be putting forward a clear left alternative to New Labour. This does not apply to the Liberal Democrats or the Scottish National Party candidates, even when they occasionally use left of Labour language. But it will apply to Scargill's candidacy in Hartlepool and some Green candidates—although other Green candidates are closer to the position of the governmental Greens in Germany and France, and do not represent any sort of left alternative to Labour.

This does not mean we abandon our traditional stance that Labour is a bourgeois workers' party, and continues to depend to a large part on the votes of workers and the financial backing of the unions. The Blairite project is to change this state of affairs and transform Labour into a fully bourgeois party, like the American Democrats. It has made considerable gains in getting mainstream big business backing, but is only part of the way towards its goal.

Driven

This was shown by the dependence of New Labour on the union leaders during the fuel price crisis last autumn and its use of Old Labour language at the autumn party conference. It is also shown by the involvement of many Labour activists and even some councillors and MPs in anti-privatisation campaigns.

Most unionised workers still continue to look to Labour, while those with reactionary ideas still look to the Tories. And in the unlikely event of Labour being driven back into opposition, there might well be a swing back to Old Labour rhetoric—as happened in Australia and New Zealand.

For these reasons we still prefer a Labour victory to a Tory (or for that matter Liberal Democrat) one, and in marginal seats make it clear that we want to see the Tories beaten.

But in the concrete circumstances of a spring general election our central stress has to be on the need for workers to break to the left from Labour. This means voting Labour cannot be the centre of our propaganda and agitation, and our main effort should not be going into arguments with those who mistakenly believe the Blairite project has fully succeeded and that Labour as a party (and not just its leadership) is indistinguishable from the Tories.

Our central slogan should be "Vote socialist—build a left alternative to Blair", and we should use the slogan "Keep the Tories out" only as a subordinate slogan.



To join the Socialist Workers Party, fill in this form and send it to:
PO Box 82, London E3 3LH

Name

Address

.....

Union.....Phone

THE SCOTTISH Socialist Party plans to stand in all 72 constituencies in Scotland. Get involved—phone 0141 221 7714

To get involved phone the National Network of Socialist Alliances on 020 7536 9696

Fax 020 7538 0140
E-mail letters@socialistworker.co.uk

or send to

letters

PO Box 82 London E3 3LH

By George, we think he got it!

REFUGEES

Their fight is ours

THE NEW immigration law passed in Spain last December is a clear attempt to undermine immigrant rights, leaving them in inhuman conditions.

The law cuts their right to vote, strike, meet and unionise.

The right wing Spanish government wants to keep the "sans papiers" in a situation of slavery.

It is playing a hypocritical role. It talks about the need for immigrants because there are not enough workers to work in jobs like fruit picking. But it does not want to give legal papers to them.

There has been popular discontent and huge opposition.

More than 700 immigrants have been occupying ten churches in Barcelona and a few in other towns since the law was passed.

Some immigrants have been on hunger strike for 15 days. The Spanish population is supporting their case

with demonstrations and signing petitions.

There were demonstrations in Barcelona, Madrid and other towns, with thousands of people supporting immigrants at the end of January.

There were also student occupations in some universities in Barcelona in February in solidarity with immigrants.

Eyes

The attack on immigrants is not the only attack the right wing government is making. The Popular Party plans a labour reform that worsens workers' rights.

Spain has one of the highest rates of accidents at work. Insecurity is also growing, while the price of housing and food is rising.

We have to keep our eyes open to see who is the real enemy of workers—the system that exploits us all, workers and immigrants.

□ **TERESA GARCIA,**
Spain

Stuff Sodexho

LAST MONTH students at Hackney Community College boycotted their canteen because of the high prices introduced by Sodexho, a private company that runs the canteen.

Sodexho also runs the voucher scheme for asylum seekers.

The majority of students and staff observed the boycott. Sodexho put a special offer on to undermine the action—

and because they were afraid of losing money.

The next day the prices were as high as ever.

Although Sodexho runs the voucher scheme, asylum seeker students cannot use the company's own vouchers in its canteen.

Hackney's refugee support group is organising another boycott.

□ **DRITAN DAUTI,**
East London

TWO CHILDREN marching in support of immigrants in Madrid. Her placard reads, "In the south, exploited. In the north, expelled"

obituary

ROB DAWBER

TRADE unionists and socialists in Sheffield will be sad to learn of the death of Rob Dawber. Rob was an active socialist and trade unionist since the mid-1970s.

Rob was local RMT branch secretary at the time of rail privatisation.

He and thousands of track workers were made redundant. Rob turned his hand to film writing and wrote a prophetic script about the effects of privatisation on rail safety.

Rob remained active and was elected as trades council secretary in 1998.

Very quickly, though, he was forced to stand down as he was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer caused by exposure to asbestos. He was given only months to live.

Rob did not give up the fight. The RMT successfully sued British Rail for compensation.

Rob's health took a rapid turn for the worse over the last couple of weeks, and he died suddenly on 20 February.

His fight against cancer typified his fight against this rotten system—he refused to give in to either.

Rob's film, *The Navigators*, directed by Ken Loach, is due to be released in the autumn and is a fitting tribute to a lifelong fighter.

Our thoughts are with Lindsey and the children.

■ **SHEFFIELD DISTRICT SWP**

I WAS one of the protesters who challenged George Robertson, the NATO general secretary, during his lecture at Dundee University two weeks ago.

Some of us dressed in suits, and I removed my socialist badge so we could gain entry to the public lecture.

Within the first minute one SWP member stood up to Robertson and shouted, "Why is NATO bombing innocent civilians in Iraq?"

All 14 of us stood up in solidarity and shouted, "You have blood on your hands!" We managed to disrupt the lecture for 20 minutes non-stop.

The continuous shouting shocked Robertson.

Everyone is buzzing, as our protest grabbed media attention. Robertson had also been picketed earlier that day in Glasgow at the Labour Party conference and challenged at a talk in Edinburgh.

The head of the university had talked of Robertson holding radical ideas and protests in his student days. I said, "Where's your radicalism now? It only lies in nuclear warfare."

□ **RABIA SALEEM,**
Dundee

DOLE FURY

I AM livid with my local job centre. When I arrived for a signing on appointment I was told that because I was early the government had to be told.

When the government sends spies to check up on the unemployed it's an insult.

It should be picking on companies that commit fraud.

I've always been brought up to believe in Labour. I will never vote for them again. They have wasted money on the Millennium Dome while giving a minuscule sum to the unemployed.

□ **UNEMPLOYED,**
Southampton

Top vote

SOCIALIST WORKER is right to say times are changing.

Millions of ordinary workers are sick of New Labour's Tory agenda. This is not just reflected in demos and protests, it is apparent inside the trade unions.

In the recent UNISON national executive elections socialist candidates did extremely well.

Janet Noble stood on a platform in defence of asylum seekers and came second with over 27,000 votes.

I was elected in the northern region on a fighting socialist platform.

□ **YUNUS BAKSH,**
UNISON NEC (personal capacity)

Songs of protest

ON THE last day of the London Tate gallery's exhibition on William Blake I saw a demonstration outside organised by the Peckham Disloyalty Association.

There were music and poetry readings in protest at the exhibition's sponsorship by GlaxoSmithKline.

Their leaflet said, "While Blake railed against poverty and oppression, GlaxoSmithKline is denying millions of African people with AIDS access to drugs that could save their lives."

The exhibition is moving to New York, where I hope someone organises a similar protest but on the first day, not the last!

□ **PETE AINSLEY,** North London

retain their power.

□ **DAVE DAVIS,**
South London

■ **AS A regular reader of your paper, I find Chris Harman's "Message To Our Readers" (*Socialist Worker*, 10 February) a rather tired and lacklustre piece.**

Yes, quite rightly, Harman points out that the political climate is changing, but what new ideas does he have? Is there a hint of an ideological shift to move with the times?

No, just the same tired old formula. Come on Chris, we deserve better.

□ **EWAN MacDONALD,**
North London

postal points

■ **WHEN I first read of Marx in 1938 I was impressed by his proposition for a future communist society.**

Since the passage of time and a lot of water under the bridge I now have to restate my present attitude.

Marx said, "My theory is not a dogma but a guide to action."

Capitalism will write a trillion words to refute him, but the rich and powerful will use any words or methods to

kid per year.

It's a private college for international students run by a businessman.

Ten more staff signed up to the NUT before I left, and next week they are meeting again to demand recognition.

Both the horrible reality of Blair's vision and the mood to fight back are there to behold in Chiswick.

□ **NICK GRANT,** West London

Blair's vision of Chiswick

THE DAY after Blair announced his plans for greater selection and privatisation in schools, I was speaking to a lunchtime meeting of staff in a west London school.

They had asked me in, as NUT branch secretary, because they are not paid on national rates, do not get a penny in London allowance, do not have union recognition, and have to write at least three reports on every

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Danger ahoy

THERE HAVE been very serious issues taking place at Portsmouth royal naval base.

I was the health and safety representative for the TGWU and a qualified life raft examiner there. I raised three issues about life rafts and lack of safety.

I was sacked after 20 years service.

I have been on a protest outside our union office in London. I believe that dangerous working practices have been going on which should be stopped.

□ **PATRICK GALVIN,**
Portsmouth

Rankin Maternity Unit

'I'm still a red on this issue'

A LIVELY, noisy demonstration of over 400 people took place in Greenock near Glasgow on Saturday of last week against the possible closure of the Rankin Maternity Unit at the Inverclyde Royal Hospital.

The march, which took place despite freezing weather, was the culmination of six weeks of well organised activity by a group of committed members of the local community.

They form the core of a campaign that includes midwives, local people and political activists.

Speakers at a rally in the town hall included a retired midwife, Margaret McKay, who set out a passionate case for retention of the unit.

Dr Mustafa Kapasi, a Greenock GP, warned that the hospital could eventually be downgraded to cottage hospital status or even closed, despite serving a community of around 80,000 people.

He likened this fight to one he had led in 1976 against an increase in junior doctors' working hours.

He told the rally, "In those days Michael Foot, then a Labour cabinet minister, called me a 'red'. Well, I'm still a red when it comes to this issue."

An "apology" for not attending the demonstration was read out on behalf of local Labour MSP Duncan McNeil.

That brought booing and shouts of, "Who?"



CHEERS AT the rally

McNeill had previously initiated a petition against closure, but had come under increasing criticism for his failure to attend any of the campaign's meetings to date.

Campaign treasurer Pat Clarke was cheered when he said that the market has no place in the provision of public healthcare.

He slammed the "faceless bureaucrats" of the local health trust.

Unanimous

He attacked the Scottish Executive for not keeping its promise of increasing local democracy through a "bonfire of the quangos" in the health service.

He also spoke for the Save the Rankin Campaign in offering support for two nearby maternity units that are also under review—at Vale of Levan in Alexandria and Royal Alexandra Hospital in Paisley.

There was a unanimous vote to oppose closure or downgrading of any of the three units, and to continue campaigning until "this threat is lifted once and for all".

The main speeches were followed by emotional appeals from local people.

"Thirty nine years ago I nearly lost my life. Myself and my son would not be here if it wasn't for the Rankin," said Catherine.

"They can talk to us about facts and figures, but the basic fact is this—one death caused by this move will be one death too many," said another Greenock mother.

Hundreds of people left the meeting enthusiastic in their determination to keep fighting alongside those trying to save the other units.

"It's been a great success," said Teresa. "We will look upwards from now on. It will be hard if the decision has already been made, but public pressure will win the day."

●TRICIA McCAFFERTY

Construction workers



Socialist Alliance

THERE WILL be a national policy conference for the National Network of Socialist Alliances on Saturday 10 March.

The meeting will decide the Socialist Alliance's election manifesto. All members of the National Network of Socialist Alliances are urged to attend.

■11am-5pm Birmingham City Posthouse Hotel, Smallbrook Queensway, Birmingham

□FRAN CHOULES was unanimously selected as Socialist Alliance candidate in Exeter at a meeting on Monday of last week.

Fran was a member of the Labour Party until last year, and he is also an active trade unionist in the post office.

The following day, a selection meeting in Watford chose Jon Berry, secretary of Hertfordshire National Union of Teachers, as the local Socialist Alliance candidate.

One member of the audience summed up the mood of the meeting, saying, "I've never had the chance to vote



socialist. My dad or grandad never had the chance to vote socialist. What you are doing in Watford is magnificent."

On the same evening 40 people attended a meeting of Brighton and Hove Socialist Alliance and selected former Labour Party member Andy Richards as their prospective parliamentary candidate for the Hove constituency.

Andy was in the Labour Party for some 20 years, and was a councillor in Hove. He is also chair of the Brighton and Hove local government UNISON union branch.

□MERSEYSIDE Socialist Alliance rally: 7.30pm, Thursday 15 March, Gladstone Hotel, Lord Nelson Street, Liverpool. Speakers include: Ken Loach, Christine Blower, Mike Marqusee, Mark O'Brien, Cathy Wilson and Peter Glover.

Defend Council Housing

BRADFORD'S hung council voted by 43 to 38 to privatise the city's 27,000 council homes last week.

The Defend Council Housing campaign in Bradford has pledged to oppose the sell off. Tenants have the final say in the ballot to be held later this year.

A preliminary survey by the council shows 82 per cent of tenants want to stay under council control.

Liberal Democrat and Tory councillors voted for the privatisation, but Labour councillors responded to a lobby by tenants and opposed the move.

Before the meeting 100 people rallied in the city centre to oppose privatisation. Three local MPs spoke out along with local trade union officials.

MAUREEN Brennan (left) confronted Michael Meacher, New Labour MP, as he arrived at a conference over safety on construction sites in central London on Tuesday.

She is the mother of Michael Brennan, who was killed on a construction site ten years ago. She is still fighting for justice.

Maureen joined other victims' families and construction workers in an angry 100-strong lobby.

Many of them forced their way into the building and succeeded in getting the Health and Safety Executive

to address the families.

John Prescott, the deputy prime minister, called the conference under pressure from the shocking rate of deaths on sites.

Over 100 workers have been killed on construction sites in the past year.

But the government refuses to impose stark penalties on companies flouting safety rules to save money.

Bosses and industry representatives were at the meeting, but the only union speaker invited was George Brumwell, head of the UCATT construction workers' union.

Incinerator protests

□WEST SUSSEX councillors told a public meeting last week that they want to build an incinerator to the north east of Crawley, just the width of a motorway away from a housing development and a school.

Everyone in the room was very angry and applauded me when I attacked the council's plans.

●MURIEL HIRSCH

□LOCAL PEOPLE in the Hunts Cross area of Liverpool scored a victory last week when they forced the council to halt plans for a new incinerator.

Meanwhile, in nearby Kirkby more than 50 people came to the first meeting of a new campaign against pollution caused by a local factory.

●ANNE ALEXANDER

Council workers

UNISON UNION members in Knowsley council, Merseyside, were due to take their third round of strike action on Thursday of this week.

They have had overwhelming support for action against an increase in the working week for white collar workers from 35 to 37 hours.

A joint union meeting has been called for Monday of next week for all council workers on 37 hours, mostly

manual workers, to begin a campaign for a strike ballot over winning a 35-hour week for all.

Key groups of workers in the finance section are likely to be pulled out for a number of weeks in March to coincide with the end of the financial year.

A further two-day all-out strike is planned for later in March, along with a rally addressed by UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis.

■For details of the 31 March rally, messages of support and donations contact Knowsley UNISON, 70/71 Admin Buildings, Admin Road, Kirkby, Knowsley, Merseyside L33 7TX. Phone 0151 548 0148 or fax 0151 545 0563.

Hackney

HACKNEY council workers in east London are preparing for another strike against cuts and privatisation on Wednesday of next week as the council sets its budget.

Hackney council is led by a Labour-Tory coalition and recently sacked its entire workforce so that it could re-hire those it wanted on worse contracts.

This move is so outrageous that, for the first time, there are signs of splits inside the Labour councillors' group. One wrote to the local paper recently supporting the workers' resistance.

Fightback, the Hackney anti-cuts group, has

launched a series of local public meetings to build the resistance to the cuts. Speakers include Liz Davies, former member of Labour's national executive, and Gary Younge the Guardian journalist.

The 7 March strike deserves every support. But a one-day strike is far too little compared to the scale of the attacks, and given that the campaign has been running for over four months.

Southampton

ABOUT 150 trade union members and supporters lobbied Southampton council on Wednesday of last week.

UNISON, the GMB, the TGWU and other council unions are angry about cuts and redundancies.

The minority Labour council plans to make savings of £5 million to £9 million by axing sports and leisure facilities, community centres and museums.

public meeting

STOP THEM PLAYING THE RACE CARD

Speakers include Tony Benn MP, Andy Gilchrist general secretary Fire Brigades Union, Louise Christian solicitor and Socialist Alliance candidate Hornsey and Wood Green, Ladislav Balaz Europe-Roma organisation and other refugee speakers

Monday 19 March, 7.30pm

Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London (nearest Holborn) called by Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers

RALLY SPEAKERS, MUSIC AND DANCE

Saturday 24 March 1pm, Trafalgar Square, London called by Speak Out Against Racism—Defend Asylum Seekers

In brief

□SOME 40 protesters picketed a book signing by Tory Ann Widdecombe at Waterstone's bookshop in Nottingham last week.

One of the protesters was Pete Radcliff, the prospective Socialist Alliance candidate for Nottingham East.

Four people joined the Socialist Alliance on the spot, and we collected £16 for the campaign to stop the deportation of a local Kurdish family, the Dags, to Turkey.

●JOHN SHEMELD

□VIRGIN AIRLINE pilots are threatening to strike unless Richard Branson ups his pay offer.

Flight crews have already voted to reject the offer, and may now hold a strike ballot if management don't shift in this week's talks.

Branson's firm tried to keep the vote secret, but the news leaked to the Daily Mirror last week.

□CARE WORKERS, relatives and other campaigners against the privatisation and closure of old people's homes in Medway were to demonstrate again outside

Medway council's meeting on Wednesday of this week.

Councillors were to discuss cuts of £500,000 through shutting the homes.

A loud and angry demonstration by staff and relatives four weeks before pushed Liberal Democrat councillors to support a Labour motion forcing the minority Tory administration to defer the cuts for further consultation.

Over 80 people attended a public meeting on Wednesday of last week addressed by trade union reps, Labour councillors and local Labour MP Jonathon Shaw.

●STEVE WILKINS

□OVER 100 people attended an "IMF: Wanted for Fraud" public meeting in Sheffield last week, organised by the African Liberation Support Campaign.

Further campaign meetings are to be held in Leeds, Scotland at the TUC Black Workers' Conference, Wales, Belfast and Dublin.

■Contact the campaign on 0116 266 4468 or 020 8749 7179.

Rolls-Royce Aerospace

Strike action is still rolling



ROLLS-ROYCE workers on the picket line last Monday

ROLLS-ROYCE workers at Ansty in the West Midlands stepped up their fight against up to 1,300 job cuts with a second round of strike action on Monday of this week.

Cars tailed back for miles from both gates as workers in the MSF and GMB unions caused massive disruption to the site.

"We're having a serious effect," one engineer told *Socialist Worker*.

The strike by 500 workers, mainly skilled engineers and office workers, has been solid.

It has run alongside a number of measures such as work to rule, casual dress and a boycott of testing a prestigious job for the Ministry of Defence.

"This is not a local dispute," added another striker. "We're fighting Rolls-Royce plc."

"If they scrap 1,300 of us there'll only be 1,200 left and they'd be much easier to pick off. There'd be no strength."

"And if Ansty goes there's at least half a dozen other small sites they'll look to attack."

The company is offering job transfers to Bristol or Canada, but it has already started advertising the jobs.

As Rebecca, an office worker, said, "People have been here for years. They have family commitments. What's to say that if we move there will be job security?"

'Workers caused massive disruption to the site'

"They have admitted as much by saying it will all be up for review within two years."

Amanda Richards, chair of Coventry Trades Council and on strike with the MSF union, believes the company is rattled.

Damage

She said, "They refuse to enter into genuine talks."

"They say everything remains a proposal, but that the proposals are irreversible."

"They're stonewalling. But they're totally motivated by profit, and that's what we're hitting. We know we're doing them damage, and they're desperate not to admit it."

● **ANDREW STONE**

Renationalise the rail

SOME 75 people came to a "Renationalise the rail" public rally in Nottingham last week.

Speakers included Alan Simpson MP, Jim Creamer, branch secretary of East Midlands RMT, and a Dudley hospitals striker.

The meeting brought together Labour Party activists, Socialist Alliance members, environmental campaigners, and members of the World Development Movement.

Some 13 people joined

the Socialist Alliance, which will be standing a candidate against John Heppell in Nottingham East. Heppell is John Prescott's parliamentary private secretary and refuses to support the call to renationalise the railways.

● **ANDY JONES**

CWU election

AROUND 70 people came to a hustings meeting in central London for the candidates for general secretary of the postal workers' CWU union last week.

John Keggie, the present union deputy general secretary, is standing against Billy Hayes, a union national officer.

Keggie stands for "partnership" with management and New Labour, while Billy Hayes speaks in more left wing tones but has a far from unblemished record.

Neither candidate supported last year's conference decision to break from New Labour if privatisation continues.

Many of those present felt that, although in the end they will vote for Billy Hayes, neither candidate reflects the feel for a fight that is widespread in the post.

● **ANDY JACKSON and GARY WATTS**

Diary
Upcoming events

● **Friday 2 March:** Protest against the *Daily Mail's* witch-hunt of Delroy Lindo.

Assemble Northcliffe House, 2 Derry Street, London W8 (off Kensington High Street), 12 noon.

● **Sunday 4 March:** Demonstrate in support of the Turkish hunger strikers.

Assemble Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park, London, 11am.

● **Thursday 15 March:** General election question time on globalisation. Speakers: Labour MP Ivor Caplin, and the prospective parliamentary candidates for the Conservatives, Greens, Liberal Democrats and Socialist Alliance. Chair: Greg Neale (BBC broadcaster and journalist).

Old Market, Upper Market Street, Hove, 7.30pm. Organised by Brighton and Hove World Development Movement.

● **Saturday 17 March:** Public meeting: The cancer epidemic, causes and prevention.

Pilgrim Conference Centre, Pilgrim Hospital, Sibsey Road, Boston, Lancashire, 2pm.

● **Saturday 31 March:** One day conference: Organising resistance to privatisation and PFI/PPP.

Speakers: Bob Crow (RMT), Liz Davies (ex Labour Party NEC) and Mark Serwotka (PCS).

South Camden Community School, Charington Street, London NW1, 12-4pm. Organised by UNISON Dudley Group of Hospitals.

Kick the market out of education

TAKING ON CUTS AND EXCLUSIONS

UP TO 300 angry students packed into a meeting on Thursday of last week to grill top management over exclusions at Luton University, and closure of the humanities, maths and technology departments.

"The mood on campus is really militant at the moment," said Chris.

"This is the biggest student meeting we have had in years. We are really pissed off. Management have come here today to patronise us and dumb down the whole issue."

Some 98 members of staff are being made redundant. Lecturers in the NATFHE union have voted unanimously to be balloted for industrial action, and support staff in the UNISON union have voted to support them.

The vice-chancellor has excluded 542 students over non-payment of rent.

He has also issued a notice threatening students who haven't paid their fees with

exclusion. Management incompetence means they don't know who has paid their fees.

Kiara was sent a letter demanding that she pay £320 or face exclusion.

She said, "They sent me this letter, but I'm fully paid up! I have to find £50 a week to pay them, plus I was charged £100 just to be allowed to pay my fees in instalments."

"It is a disgrace. The whole fees system stinks and we have to get rid of it."

The NUS at Luton was set to hold a meeting on Thursday of this week during the national shutdown over fees. Student Ross Miller said, "So many students are talking about occupying."

"We have to send a clear message to the vice-chancellor that we won't allow one student to be excluded or one lecturer to be sacked. It's time for us to stand up and fight for our education."

● **VIV SMITH**

Southampton

ABOUT 60 angry students turned up to a joint lecturers' and students' meeting on Wednesday of last week to discuss what action will be taken over management proposals to sack 22 lecturers and close three courses at Southampton Institute.

The meeting was defiant, and ready to take the message to institute bosses that the cuts would not happen without a fight.

The following day 90 students attended a forum to put questions to management but left more angry

than when they came in.

A meeting afterwards resolved to support lecturers in their ballot for escalating strike action, and to go all out for the NUS national shutdown on Thursday of this week.

● **STEVE SQUIBBS**

UEL

THOUSANDS OF staff and students at the University of East London (UEL) have signed a statement of no confidence in the university's senior management.

Over 200 staff have lost their jobs in the last four years. Now vice-chancellor Frank Gould has demanded another £3 million in cuts and redundancies.

A meeting of 250 staff

and students recently confronted UEL governors. Martin Hoyles, chair of the lecturers' NATFHE union branch, told the governors, "This management must go."

Student union president Garry Chick said, "You must help us to solve its problems. If you do not, the consequences will be serious."

Tile Hill

AROUND 150 students occupied the refectory at Tile Hill Further Education College in Coventry on Thursday of last week in protest at the rip off prices of multinational caterers Sodexho.

The two-hour sit-in, which followed a petition of 400 students, was protesting at extortionate canteen costs—such as a single bacon rasher costing 40p.

Norwich

A MEETING of 120 lecturers in the NATFHE union at Norwich City College last week voted by 118 to two for an indicative ballot for industrial action.

They are fighting to defend quality education and stop the worsening of contracts.

Warwick

WARWICK University has retreated from its threat to make the purchase of laptop computers compulsory after students reacted with outrage to the plans.

The poorly hidden top-up fee, dubbed "the laptop-up fee" by activists, would have required all students to fork out at least £1,300 for IBM computers.

The scheme has now been ruled out, at least until 2003, after students began to build support for a protest surrounding Senate House (the administration building that was occupied for a day last year).

Management now declares that it wants students to play a more active role in discussing alternative proposals.

Campaigns for peace

□ AROUND 70 people attended a Palestine Solidarity Campaign meeting in Glasgow last week.

Scottish National Party MSP Shona Robison and leading pro-Palestinian academic Dr Michael Prior were joined by Palestinian and Jewish speakers in calling for solidarity with the intifada.

A message of support was read out from STUC general secretary Bill Speirs. A Scotland-wide demonstration is planned for this Saturday, 3 March. Assemble 11am, East Market Street, Edinburgh.

● **MARK BROWN**

□ THERE WAS an inspiring protest in Parliament Square last Thursday evening against the bombing of Iraq. About 30 people sang and waved placards.

A lot of motorists honked

their horns in support of the demonstration, organised as part of a week-long protest against the bombings.

● **MARY PHILLIPS**

□ SOME 20 members of the Socialist Alliance, CND and the Coalition Against Sanctions and War in Iraq petitioned and lobbied Manchester Labour MP

Keith Bradley last weekend over depleted uranium.

John Clegg, former Labour councillor and now Socialist Alliance candidate, told the protest, "Keith Bradley and his government are out of touch with the people in Withington. Depleted uranium should be banned now."

● **CAROLE HAINES**

Firefighters

FIREFIGHTERS IN Derbyshire are "withdrawing goodwill" with the Labour-controlled county council over a £1 million cut in the budget.

A spokesperson for the firefighters' FBU union told *Socialist Worker*, "Last time we went into dispute with the council they hid behind a Tory government. They cannot do that now. Gordon Brown should spend some of his billions on essential services."

● **JAMES EADEN**



Picture: JESS HURD

OVER 100 people attended a public meeting in Tottenham, north London, last week to hear Delroy Lindo, Raphael Rowe, the Harry Stanley campaign and others talk of their fights for justice

Socialist Worker

BIRMINGHAM MARCH

for public services, this Saturday,
3 March, assemble 10.30am,
Chamberlain Square, Birmingham

Rage against privatisation



Picture: STEFANO CAGNONI/reportdigital.co.uk

MICK RIX, general secretary of ASLEF (centre), launches the campaign for rail renationalisation, with other leading trade unionists

STRIKES CAN KEEP LONDON TUBE SAFE

THE BATTLE over New Labour's plan to privatise the tube in London was coming to a head this week.

Tony Blair met Gordon Brown and John Prescott on Monday, and refused to abandon the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) scheme which means breaking up the tube and handing it to private companies such as Balfour Beatty.

They decided to press ahead just as the RMT rail union began rebalotting its members on the tube for a strike over the threat privatisation poses to safety and workers' conditions.

John Prescott's plan for the tube is almost identical to the disastrous privatisation of the mainline railway.

It is so unpopular that even the Tories, who pushed through rail privatisation six years ago, were moving to drop their own version of tube privatisation this week.

A top Tory told the *Financial Times*, "We have to accept that

83 percent of Londoners are totally opposed to privatisation of the tube."

Ken Livingstone tapped that anti-privatisation feeling when he won the election for London mayor last year.

At the start of this week he was threatening the government with court action if it pushed ahead with its scheme.

Furious

Livingstone was furious that New Labour had dismissed his alternative plan for bringing private money into the tube.

Much more is at stake than rival financing plans for London Underground.

Blair is digging in because privatisation through PPP and PFI schemes is central to New Labour's plans for health, education, transport and the whole of the public sector.

Mass opposition to privatisation fuelled public support for the

one-day strike by tube workers on 5 February.

Thousands of RMT union members, who were banned from striking by a judge, broke the anti-union laws that day by not crossing picket lines set up by drivers in the ASLEF union.

That kind of action is needed urgently. Tube workers have the power to kill privatisation stone dead.

That was the message from a meeting of union activists on the tube last week.

It launched a campaign for an overwhelming vote for strike action in the RMT.

Ballot papers are due to be returned by the end of next week.

New Labour's only hope for getting privatisation through is stringing out negotiations between the unions and tube management, and between Prescott and Ken Livingstone, until it gets a compromise.

The tube unions should not let that happen.

"I CALL on everyone to attend this Saturday's march and rally in Birmingham. We can make a difference."

That statement comes from Steve Godward, the divisional secretary of West Midlands Fire Brigades Union, urging support for the anti-privatisation demonstration in Birmingham.

The march will end with a lobby of Gisela Stuart. She is a Birmingham New Labour MP and health minister.

Saturday's demonstration was called by the 600 striking ancillary workers at Dudley Group of Hospitals.

They have been taking strike action since August to stop the NHS trust handing their jobs over to a private company.

The march is a focus for other local groups who are furious that vital services are under attack from New Labour's privatisation policies.

Steve says, "As an FBU member I stood and watched Labour councillors grunt through the introduction of PFI into the fire service, and put our communities at risk by closing Aldridge and Bloxwich fire stations and build one PFI replacement.

"We have great concerns that public safety is at risk.

"I never voted to mortgage my kids' future through privatisation of our public services.

"That is why I have resigned my Labour membership. They don't represent my class."

Firefighters, their families and friends planned to march from Birmingham central fire station and join with local UCATT union members on the way.

Local UCATT official Neil Vernon joined Angela

'This march sends a message to Labour—trade unionists and campaigners are determined to beat privatisation'

Thompson, Dudley striker and Socialist Alliance candidate, on a Radio West Midlands programme last week to publicise Saturday's march.

UCATT members, alongside other local council manual workers, face the privatisation of their jobs in the housing repairs and maintenance department.

Repairs

They are angry that the Labour-run council has tried to scapegoat them for the backlog in housing repairs.

They planned a protest on Saturday outside the offices of the *Evening Mail*, which has printed the council's lies.

In reality the council has been running down the service in preparation for its planned privatisation of all 95,000 council homes.

Some 30 elderly people's homes are also under threat from privatisation in Birmingham. This has sparked a massive campaign, RAGE, whose supporters were due to

bring the campaign banner on the march.

Health workers and campaigners were also set to join Saturday's march against the closure of two local hospitals and their replacement with one PFI hospital.

The shutdown of the Queen Elizabeth and Selly Oak hospitals will mean the loss of 50 beds when services are already stretched.

John Gatling, who is part of the campaign to save the hospitals, said, "Saturday is a good opportunity to link up all the campaigns and bring our struggles together."

The Dudley health strikers are at the forefront of the growing resistance to privatisation.

Their battle has forced the NHS trust to again delay signing the contract to hand over jobs to private firm Summit Healthcare.

Saturday's march sends a message to New Labour—trade unionists and campaigners are determined to beat privatisation.

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